The Martyr of Kolin

H. O. Ward.

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THE MARTYR OF KOLIN

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THE MARTYR OF KOLIN

A STORY OF

The Bohemian Persecution

BY

H. O. WARD

"Happy is he
Of whom (himself among the dead
And silent) this word shall be said:
—That he might have had the World with him,
But chose to side with suffering Men,
And had the World against him!'

E. B. BROWNING.

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THE MARTYR OF KOLIN.

CHAPTER I.

A HUSSITE FAMILY.

I SCARCE know why I should be the one to write a chronicle of the man I respected more than any man I ever knew besides. There are many others who doubtless could do it far better than I can, and could show more effectually how great was his worth and goodness. Yet I may truly say that none loved him better than I did, and therefore I may hope that I shall in some measure worthily tell a part of his story, and of mine as associated with him.

I can plainly perceive that I must to some extent tell my own story first, in order to make clear what I have to tell about him; and so,

although I am only plain Hugh Werner—an exile for the Reformed Faith, which I and my parents before me have held dearer than life—I trust I may be pardoned for introducing my subject with some words about myself.

I was born in the year 1560 at Kolin, near Prague, my parents being well endowed with this world's goods, and also connected with several noble Bohemian families. They had besides me a son, who died in infancy, and my sister Wilhelmina, or Wilma, as we called her for brevity. Until I was a child of ten or thereabouts, those who held the Reformed Faith, and were content to remain quiet, lived in comparative security, and were little troubled by the authorities; but I well remember the time when a fresh persecution broke out among us, spreading dismay among those who realized its full import. From our earliest childhood we had been told of Huss, and of our other martyrs, and we had been taught to hold our faith as our dearest possession; but we had come to look on the awful tales of torture and death as scarcely more real than

were the legends of the saints which were taught at the convent schools or preached from the pulpits. I can well recollect the day when my father entered our mother's chamber, where we were sitting, and told us in his grave and serious way that a fresh edict was issued against those who held the Reformed Faith.

My mother clasped Wilma tightly to her, and all the colour left her face, as she said, "Arnold, is it indeed true? Art thou certain of this news?"

My father told her that he had heard it on good authority that morning in the town; and also that, alarmed by it, many of the brethren had determined to conform to Catholicism.

I was then but a thoughtless child, and consequently took in but little of the import of these tidings; and indeed they made no great difference to me, though I grieved to see my mother looking so anxious and troubled, and my father's brow clouded over with anxiety.

Wilma and I played together as usual, and

paid no heed to the atmosphere of danger and secrecy in which we lived. We heard that some of our father's friends had been taken to prison, and that others had forsaken the faith, these being spoken of with bated breath as *"the lapsed"*; but in time we became so accustomed to this kind of conversation that we ceased to give any heed to it.

It was not until I began to go to school with other boys of my age, and found that I was shunned and despised as the child of heretic parents, that I realized a little of what our position as a family really was. No boy of any spirit would fail to resent the covert remarks, the slights, the insults heaped on him by his schoolmates, merely on account of his parents' creed; and I, being strong and active, and longing to excel both in sports and in work, felt very keenly the solitary position in which I was placed. Hitherto I had been a Hussite because my parents were so, and because I had had little or no intercourse with persons of any other faith, and therefore I had neither knowledge nor ex-

perience which might enable me to answer the arguments or to withstand the taunts of the other boys. To speak the truth, indeed, I thought the bright musical services in the well-filled Catholic churches were far pleasanter than the secret and often sorrowful meetings that were held in cellars and barns, to which I was sometimes taken; and I saw no reason why I should be rendered miserable and put in all sorts of peril by being forced to profess a belief for which I really cared nothing.

Of all this I never spoke to my parents, or to the grave pastors who sometimes, at the risk of life or liberty, visited us in secret. At home I was willing enough to conform to my parents' wishes, and worship as they pleased, but at school I thought it might be different. Ah, what a coward I was, in spite of my strong limbs and bodily strength! No boy of my age could beat me in wrestling and sword-play; and yet the youngest among them could make me tremble by a sneer at my faith, or a jesting threat to give me over to the authorities. I was ashamed of it all

—ashamed of my belief—yes, even of my parents, and my great wish came to be to pass as a Catholic, and to live peaceably with as little religion as possible. My parents would have been grieved and shocked if they had known my feelings, and no doubt they would have reasoned with me, and tried to convince me of my cowardice; but I did not let them know what was passing in my mind, and thus added deceit to the other faults of that time.

As for little Wilma, she was a gentle, sweet-tempered, loving child, accepting and believing the Hussite doctrines, and finding, I am sure, much comfort from them. I was indeed still proud of our noble martyr ancestors, in spite of my wavering faith—proud of John Huss, of Master Jerome, his disciple, and of the many others who had laid down their lives for their adherence to the truth they held; but for me, Hugh Werner, such devotion as theirs seemed impossible, impracticable.

When I was fifteen years old the light first broke upon my mind and heart, and it happened in this way. I was at the time

almost at the head of our Kolin school, a tall, strong lad, feared by the small boys, and respected by the elder ones; and, by dint of careful acquiescence in all religious matters, I had made a position for myself with both masters and scholars. It was a cold winter's morning, soon after the feast of Christmas, and I was hastening to school with my bag of books on my back, and whistling as I went a German air that I had picked up from some strolling musicians. My road lay through the market-place, and I was all the more pleased to go that way because a troop of soldiers had halted in the open square to rest for an hour or two before continuing their march to Prague. With boyish curiosity I stopped to look at their bright helmets and glistening breastplates, and to exchange a word or two with a friendly fellow who was smoking his long pipe in a doorway. Then, fearing to linger any longer, I turned down a side street which led to the school. Half-way down the street I noticed a little crowd collected, so I ran forward to see what was the cause of the excitement. Up against the wall of a house,

shrinking and sobbing, I perceived a peasant girl, whom a half-drunken soldier was trying to seize by the arm. The girl was terrified by his loud oaths and his harsh voice, and tried to escape from him, but he caught her arm roughly and held her fast. At that moment a man pushed his way through the little group of onlookers and went up to the soldier, saying in a firm, commanding voice:

"Leave the maiden alone, sir; she is frightened by you."

The fellow turned round with an oath, and asked what business it was of the newcomer's.

"It is my business to protect the weak," he said, stepping in front of the girl, and facing the angry man steadily. I took a good look at him, for I liked his voice and his courage. He was not nearly so tall or powerful as the soldier, but he was upright and strong, and he had a splendid face—full of purpose and resolve—and looked as if he did not know what fear meant. His opponent, wild with rage and drink, drew his sword, and made a dash at the girl's protector, who was unarmed. The young

man parried the blow by striking up the sword with his hand, and the soldier then struck again, and wounded the man slightly in the arm. By this time quite a number of people had collected, and several cried "Shame!" "Fetch one of the officers!" Still the unequal contest went on, no one liking to cope with the enraged and well-armed soldier, and to put an end to the scene. I was fascinated by that man's face, and stayed watching, rooted to the spot, and wishing that he had a sword, so that we might have seen an honest duel, instead of this one-sided onslaught. When the man was wounded again, a cry from several of the women and from the girl whom he was protecting at last attracted the notice of an officer and several soldiers, who came up and seized the fellow, still struggling and striking out until he was forcibly disarmed. But when we turned our eyes away from the offender, we found that the other man had quietly slipped away among the crowd, and could not now be found.

I went back to school glowing with enthusiasm at the brave deed which I had just

witnessed, and longing to tell Wilma all about it at dinner-time.

But when I got home, after morning school was over, I was met by Elspeth, our servant (we had kept but two servants of late years), who told me that my father wished to see me in his private chamber. I went to him at once, and found him sitting at his table, writing a letter. He looked up as I entered, and said in his grave, measured tones:

"Can I trust you, my son?"

"I hope so, sir," I answered, a little offended at such a question.

"Know, then, that we shall have a guest to-night, a pastor of the Reformed Faith. I wish to let our neighbour, Master Müller, know, so that he may come hither secretly to see him; and we shall have a small assembly for prayer. Will you carry this message for me? I dare not write it."

"I will do your bidding, sir," I said, outwardly acquiescent, but inwardly chafing at the duty laid upon me. "Another of these long-faced, narrow-minded pastors," I thought to myself; "another meeting, to cry down our

neighbours, and say how superior we are to them!"

"Ask to see Master Müller himself, and say to him, 'To-night he is prayed to sup with me, on matters touching his most important business.' He will conceive of your meaning."

"I will do so, sir," I answered, and turned to leave the room.

"Thou art not over glad of this news, son," said my father, looking into my face; "art afraid of the danger?"

"Nay," I replied, flushing up; "but I find these good pastors so solemn, and—and they always speak against the Church and the priests. Wherefore are we obliged to meet in such secrecy? Why not worship in the church as other men do?"

I had never spoken so openly before, and I was half afraid of my own boldness; but my father only sighed.

"We do it because our enemies will not allow us to worship God as we think right," he answered; "and indeed our pastors have need to protest against the errors by which

we are surrounded. Master Reichner, however, is not one of the most solemn of our friends. He is still young, and full of life and zeal."

"Ah!" thought I, "*that* means that he will rail against and denounce everybody and everything, as the last one did, even to the lace on my mother's gown and the ribbon in Wilma's hair."

I did my errand, and delivered my message to Master Müller in person. The good man was delighted to receive it, and promised to come that evening without fail.

When I reached home from afternoon school, I went up to a little upper chamber which Wilma and I had as our own, and there I found my sister—who was at the time a fair young maiden of thirteen—busy with her needle.

"Well, sister," said I, "so we are to have another of these good gentlemen to-night."

"He has come," she said mysteriously.

"Has he? What is he like?" I asked.

"I have not seen him, for he is closeted with our father in his private chamber."

"Will he sup openly with us to-night?"

"Yes, I think so. Elspeth will keep a careful watch, and there is the door behind the tapestry, you know, in case of a surprise."

I sat down on the edge of the table, and took up a neat little garment Wilma had just completed.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Oh, it is a little shirt for Widow Korn's baby," she said; "I made it myself."

"What a good little thing you are!" I said suddenly; "you are always thinking of others. To tell the truth, *I* am half tired of the whole business."

"Hugh! What do you mean?"

"All this fuss, and secrecy, and scruples about religion. What's the harm of indulgences, and priests, and confessionals? I am sure I don't know! One way is as good as another, and why not go the way which is safest and easiest?"

Wilma looked at me with terror in her blue eyes.

"Brother!" she cried, "surely you are not

in earnest? You cannot, you cannot mean what you say!"

"I don't know *what* I mean," I said crossly. "You need not look at me as if I were a thief or a reprobate. Surely a fellow may speak his mind."

She began to cry, and that softened me. I cannot bear to see a woman weep.

"There, leave off crying, Wilma," I said. "I did not mean it; I was only joking. Listen, and I will tell you what I saw to-day."

And I related the scene I had witnessed that morning.

Wilma listened eagerly, and when I had finished she said:

"What a brave man! How I should like to see him! You must tell mother about it, Hugh."

"You forget there is this pastor coming," I said. "To-night we shall have nothing but discussion on religion and on our grievances."

Once more Wilma's face clouded, and I saw that she was distressed by my words; but we were saved a quarrel by the entrance of

Gretchen, the maid, who came to say that supper was just ready.

Wilma flew to smooth her hair, and I went down to the long parlour, where I found my mother alone. In another minute my father entered, followed by his guest, Master Reichner.

My heart gave a great leap when I saw him, for I recognized him at once. I had seen that active, upright figure, that resolute, handsome face before; and I knew that the pastor and the gallant preserver of the girl that morning were one and the same man.

"This is my son Hugh," my father said, presenting me; while I looked at the visitor, unable to conceal my surprise and bewilderment.

He smiled at my earnest gaze, and said:

"I think I have seen you before. Is it not so?"

"To be sure you have," I burst out, regardless of etiquette. "I saw you do a gallant deed this very day, Master Reichner."

He reddened like a girl, and signed to me to stop.

"Never mind that; it is not worth talking about," he said hurriedly; and I liked him all the better for his modesty.

When Wilma came into the room a moment later I whispered to her who the pastor was, and she was nearly as much surprised as I had been.

Good Master Müller now arrived, and we all went in to supper. In spite of the risk, and the need for secrecy and caution, we had a pleasant, lively meal, our new friend being by no means like those gloomy and forbidding ministers who had visited us in times past. I found that he had been a soldier, and had seen a good deal of the world, before he became one of the "Reformed"; and even now he was constantly having hair-breadth escapes and wonderful adventures, some of which he related in a quiet, unostentatious, yet withal amusing manner. I began to look on our faith in a somewhat different light. If a young, strong man, full of courage and vigour as he was, found it worth while to risk all for the Reformed religion, perhaps,

after all, it *was* nobler and better than the Popish creed of our neighbours. How his face lighted up when he spoke of the Truth which he and my parents loved! He had absolutely no cant about him, but was honest, true, and open—not one whit ashamed of his faith or his friends.

After supper we had a little meeting for prayer and the reading of God's Word. There were only ourselves, Master Müller, the servants, and one or two old people who had slipped in from the town, but there was a wonderful spirit in the meeting. The fervour and happiness of Master Reichner seemed to enter into all our hearts, even into mine—putting religion in such a new light to me. It seemed to be something worth living and dying for—something real and substantial: more—much more—than a mere subject for theological contention. As the little service continued, I saw a new side to his character. Before he had been the gallant and courteous gentleman, the kind and sympathetic guest. Now he was the earnest, soul-stirring pastor, speaking with a wisdom and large-heartedness

of which I had never heard the like before. He left all questions of creeds and ceremonies, and merely told us of the love of God, and of the strength that He gives to His servants. For the first time in my life I felt a longing, weak indeed, but real, to be God's servant; and when we all knelt in prayer I did earnestly ask to be taught the Truth, and to be kept steadfast.

We had hardly risen from our knees when my father held up his hand for silence.

"Disperse quietly," he said. "They are knocking at the door. Elspeth, go and open it."

We obeyed him, Wilma and I placing ourselves by the fire, while Herr Müller and the servants quietly left the room by the back way. My mother sat down at the table and took up some work, while my father lifted a portion of the tapestry which hung round the room, and motioned to our guest to slide aside a panel in the wall. He obeyed, and disclosed an opening, through which he entered; the panel was then replaced, and all was once more in its usual order.

We sat with beating hearts, as a heavy tread on the stairs told us that our unwelcome visitors were coming up to the room. The next minute the door opened, and a priest entered, followed by a couple of armed men.

"Where is the heretic who is with you to-night?" asked the priest unceremoniously.

"We are alone," replied my father, making a motion of his hand towards my mother and us.

"You do not deny that the reprobate Reichner was with you this evening," exclaimed the priest. "He has been guilty, not only of heresy, but of a foul assault on one of the King's Guard. Where is the fellow, sirrah?"

My blood boiled at his insolence, and the way in which he alluded to Master Reichner's action in the morning, but a warning touch from Wilma made me restrain myself.

"You can see he is not with us, sir priest," returned my father. "You are at liberty to search the house for him, if you will."

The three men availed themselves of this

permission to ransack the house, turning every cupboard inside out, and thundering at the walls, in order to discover a secret chamber or hiding-place. But on this occasion they were not successful, and at last, vexed and baffled, they returned to the room where we still sat.

"The villain has escaped us this time, Master Werner," said the priest menacingly; "but soon both you and he will be taken to justice. The Church has her eye on you, and you shall not escape."

With this threat they left the house, and once more we could breathe freely.

As soon as all was safe, our guest came forth from his hiding-place, and there was much gladness over his escape. I watched to see whether Master Reichner would insist upon a prayer meeting then and there, to give thanks for his deliverance; but he did no such thing. All he did was to say, "Thank God for His merciful protection," in an earnest way, as though he were absolutely sure in his own mind that God *had* in very deed watched over him.

Then, turning to my father, he said:

"Master Werner, I think I must now be speeding on my way, for I want to reach Prague under cover of the darkness. I suppose all is safe now, and I can start at once."

"I hope that there is no danger," replied my father. "You can go out by the back door, and leave the town by side streets, where you will not be likely to meet any priests or officers."

"I would I knew the town rather better," said Master Reichner; "for in this darkness I shall, as likely as not, run into the hands of my enemies."

"I will go with you," I said impulsively, stepping forward; "I know every street in Kolin, and I can set you on your way."

My father looked surprised, for I had never before voluntarily made such an offer; but he raised no objections to my plan.

"Aye, go, my son," he said; "but be cautious, and do not raise your voice in conversation."

"I thank you for your thought," Master

Reichner said heartily. "I shall be very glad of your company."

In a few minutes more the young pastor and I, two cloaked and silent figures, stole out into the dark street. We spoke but little, and only in low tones, until the outskirts of the town were reached in safety. I noticed that my companion began to lag behind somewhat, and once or twice he stopped altogether for a moment. At last he said, half apologetically:

"Pardon me, but I fear I must tarry a few moments for this foolish faintness." And he sank down on a stone by the roadside. A struggling moonbeam showed me how pale he had become, and I was somewhat alarmed; but he reassured me. "It is only that I have lost a little blood to-day," he said; "and though it is slight, my wound is somewhat painful."

Truth to tell, it had escaped my memory that he had been wounded in the morning's struggle; and I now wondered how he could have held on for so long a walk without a word of complaint.

"Has it been dressed and bandaged?" I asked.

"Nay," he said, smiling; "I tied on my kerchief myself as best I could, but I find that it has slipped."

I offered to readjust it, and on doing so, I was horrified by the serious nature of the sword-cuts he had received.

"By the rood, sir!" I cried, "I could never have borne in silence such pain as you must have suffered!"

"You forget that I have been in the wars, and we soldiers learn not to complain of trifles," he said, as I, clumsily enough, tried to bind up his shoulder. When I had done, he thanked me, and said he was all right once more, and could go on his way.

"But you," he said, "ought to go back to Kolin. You have come far enough from home, and I can find my way now without any difficulty."

I protested, and he let me go a little further with him along the dark, lonely road. I forget what we spoke of during the first part of our walk, but as the time drew near when

I must leave him, I longed to speak about the thoughts which had of late filled my heart.

"Master Reichner," I said awkwardly at last, "are you really so fond of the Reformed Faith?"

"Aye, to be sure I am," he answered, smiling at my question. "I have found happiness and rest in it, and I would not change it for the world."

"Is it worth giving up pleasure and popularity and friends for?" I asked.

"A thousand times, yes!" he cried eagerly, "and life itself. It is no dead creed to me, but a living reality, which strengthens all my being."

"Well," I said impulsively, "if it made me like you I would go in for it heart and soul."

"You are not one of the Reformed, then?" he asked.

"I am, in name, because my father is," I replied; "but to-day I have begun to feel as if it were worth giving up something for."

"It is indeed," Master Reichner said

earnestly. "I never had any rest till I threw up all and confessed my faith, and now I am fully satisfied with my choice."

"But it must be such a dreary life, ever in hiding, never safe from pursuit."

"One gets used to everything in time."

"Do you never long to have a home of your own, where you might dwell in peace?"

A spasm of pain crossed his face, and he did not reply for a moment. Then he looked full at me, and answered:

"Yes, I do long for it, almost beyond bearing sometimes; but for even that I would not renounce the service of God."

We walked on in silence for a few minutes, many new thoughts crowding into my mind.

"It must be a noble religion," I said at last, "if a young, brave fellow like you can give up everything for it."

"You see," he said simply, "Christ Jesus gave up infinitely more for my sake."

The moon now poured down clear and full on his face, and I looked at him with a sort of awe. It seemed all so real to him; not a mere dry, bitter creed, but a living faith. The next

moment he turned to me, speaking in quite a different tone.

"Now," he said, stopping, "I absolutely forbid you to come any further with me. Your mother will be anxious about you."

Rather reluctantly, I stopped too, and he held out his hand heartily.

"Fare you well, and God speed you," he said; "I hope we shall meet again before long."

"I trust your wounds will not give you much trouble," I said, "and that you will reach Prague in safety."

"Oh, never fear for me," he answered cheerily; and with another handshake he turned and walked down the road.

I watched his upright, active figure out of sight, and then set forth on my homeward way, half ashamed to find what a hold this stranger had taken upon me. I could not get his face or his words out of my head, and I found myself wishing that I were like him, and resolving to be as brave as he was. I reached home in safety, much to the relief of my mother, who had sat up to watch for my

return; and as I crept upstairs to bed, a little white-robed figure stole out from a shadowy doorway.

"Is that you, Hugh?" asked Wilma softly; "is he all right, and did you talk to him much?"

"You ought to be in bed," I said, not too gently, I fear; "I will talk to you to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said, in her patient little voice. "I am glad you got back safely, Hugh."

And her door closed as quietly as it had opened.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING IN THE WOOD.

THREE weeks passed before I heard any more of my new friend. They were weeks of difficulty and perplexity for me, for, in my new zeal for the faith, I was very unwise in my eager declamations at school. My father reproved me for my foolish chatter; my mother sighed, and begged me to be cautious; old Elspeth declared that I should be the ruin of my parents and of them all. Only Wilma praised me, and admired my courage in making a stand. Ah, what a fool I was! I now ran to the other extreme, and whereas formerly I delighted in posing as a Catholic, I now let everybody know that both I and my parents belonged to the Reformed Church. The boys who had sneered at me for my cowardice, now laughed at my hot-headed zeal.

"Poor fellow," most of them said, "he will get over it soon. It is just a fresh craze he has got!"

I did not find it easy to be true to my new profession, for I did not meet with much sympathy from those who had known me as a half-hearted waverer.

"I do not trust such sudden earnestness," said Herr Müller to my father in a low voice one evening, after I had been rather boastfully declaring what I meant to do for our cause. "Great heat is followed by great coldness in the young. Too much talk, young Hugh, too much talk. All smoke and no fire."

I did not answer him, for it would ill have become me to contradict my elder; but at the same time what he said made me feel very indignant. How they wronged me, I thought. They would soon find that Hugh Werner was as ardent and faithful as any of them.

The very next day I had a grievous fall, which cooled my zeal for some time. In the playground of our school one of the boys came up to me and said mockingly:

"Ha! Werner, so you are one of the

Reformed, are you? Quite a new idea, isn't it? How do you like it?"

"Yes, I am," I answered hotly, "and I dare you to speak a word against my religion."

A burst of laughter greeted my challenge.

"Ah!" cried Max Paulus, the boy who had spoken first, "the Reformed are too cowardly to retaliate; Father Peter said so last Sunday. *You* have got to give up fighting and sport, you know. Psalm-singing is all *you* are good for now."

Infuriated by this taunt, I sprang at him and knocked him over, for I was taller than he. Max fell heavily on the ground, and lay quite white and still, while the other boys stood round horror-struck. My passion cooled in an instant, but I could not make him open his eyes or speak to me. At this moment one of the masters happened to pass, and inquired what was the matter.

"Werner has killed Paulus," said one of the boys, "because Paulus charged him with being a heretic. Werner was showing us how the heretics treat their enemies."

The master looked sternly at me, and bade

me go indoors at once, but I begged hard to be allowed to remain until Paulus recovered consciousness.

"Indeed, sir, I had no thought of hurting him," I urged; "but he insulted my religion."

"A fine religion yours," said one boy, "if you have to knock us down to prove what it is worth."

"I thought you pretended to be at peace with all men," sneered another, as the master lifted up Paulus and carried him away.

Crestfallen and ashamed of myself, I followed him across the courtyard, to receive the flogging which I knew I had merited. Yes, my pride had a bad fall that day, for I had given everyone a chance of mocking at my faith.

"Here," they said, "is one who sets himself up as being better than we are, and yet, at the smallest provocation, he nearly murders his comrade. Which of *us* would do the like?"

Paulus recovered his senses before very long, to my intense relief; but he was quite ill with a headache for one or two days afterwards, and I became a mark for all eyes.

"There goes the young heretic who half murdered his fellow," I overheard one woman say to another as I passed them in the street.

My parents were extremely grieved and vexed at what had happened, for it not only proved that my zeal for the Reformed Faith was merely an outward zeal, but it brought our family into very undesirable notoriety. When I went home that evening, with aching back and heavy heart, it was Wilma who stole up to me, and laid her soft face against my shoulder in mute sympathy. My father said very little, but his few words of reproach cut me to the heart.

"I hoped, Hugh," he said, "that you were indeed desirous of leading a new life, but this proves that your resolve was but a passing fancy."

I think, now, that they were a little hard on such a young beginner as I was; but still it was needful that our persecuted Church should be kept pure and without reproach, and so the smallest offence was visited very severely.

Several miserable days passed, and Max Paulus was once more able to resume his

studies and sports. He treated me with ill-concealed aversion and distrust, in spite of all my attempts at friendliness. I was looked upon as the black sheep of the school, and at home I met with little more sympathy, and was regarded as a backslider and one who could not be trusted. My earnest love for the cause cooled down a little under this discipline, and I sometimes wished that I had been less hasty in declaring myself as one of the Reformed.

In this miserable frame of mind I resolved, one half-holiday, to go for a long ramble in the fields and woods outside the town, quite by myself, where I could be free from mocking faces, or, worse still, grave parental reproaches. It was a cloudy, dismal afternoon, but that suited me better than a bright day would have done.

The snow still lay scattered over the land, and there was a chilly wind which whistled about my head as I strode along the road towards Prague. I had walked about two miles when I felt a snowflake fall on my face, and, looking up at the gray sky overhead,

I saw that I should be caught in a storm before long. "Well, so much the better," I said to myself, turning up the collar of my coat, with a vague sort of feeling that just then it was better to face the elements than my fellow-creatures in Kolin. I therefore kept on my way in spite of the snow, which soon fell thick and fast around me, making my shoulders and cap as white as the ground. At first I enjoyed it, but then I began to see that it was foolish to be still going further from home, for the evening would be drawing in, and the snow might drift and stop my way. So I turned and entered a field by the road-side, across which I meant to take a short cut to Kolin. But I found the snow was deeper than I had expected, and after a few hundred yards I had to stop and look round me to take my bearings. All about me I saw snow, white and glistening, and getting deeper every minute. Behind me lay the road, and before a thick wood through which I had to go. Once in its shelter the snow would be less deep, I thought, and I might sit down and rest for a few moments; so I walked on as

fast as I could, plunging sometimes knee-deep, where the fierce wind had blown the snow into small drifts.

I was quite out of breath by the time I had gained the wood, and it was a relief to find that the thick pine trees were some shelter from the storm. Shaking the snow from my shoulders, I walked on among the shadowy pine stems, keeping a careful look-out, for fear of losing my way. I thought I knew the place perfectly well, so I was much surprised to see, a few yards ahead of me, a good-sized hut, built of logs, in a clearing, which I had never noticed before. It did not look exactly like a dwelling-house, but more like a barn, or woodman's shelter; and as a shelter I determined to use it, for I saw that it was no use to push on any further until the storm had somewhat abated.

With this end in view I stepped across the cleared space and looked about for a door, and as I did so the sound of voices fell on my ear. I listened intently, and was soon convinced that I had surprised some of the Reformed at one of their secret meetings.

"From all our enemies, and from those who would root us out of the land, we pray Thee, deliver us, O Lord," came in earnest supplication from a voice within, while several others joined in the "Amen." I knocked softly at the door, and next moment it was opened by a strong young fellow, who looked like a farmer.

"Ha! a spy!" he exclaimed, seizing me roughly by the arm. "How dare you creep up and listen at doors?"

Indignantly wrenching myself free, I cried:

"You mistake. I am no spy, but one of the Reformed, as I judge you to be also. I came to seek shelter from the storm; but it seems that I had better trust to the woods, and not to such grudging fellows as you."

"You need not be so violent, young man," said the other more gently. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Before I could answer, another man stepped to the door, and I exclaimed joyfully:

"Oh, Master Reichner, is it you? Now I am well content."

It was indeed my friend the young pastor,

whom I had not seen since I bade him farewell three weeks before on the road to Prague, and he recognized me at once.

"Come in and welcome, Hugh Werner!" he said heartily. "All right, Meyer: I know him well and trust him."

At these words, which sent a thrill of pleasure through me, the young farmer stood aside and let me pass in, whereupon I found myself in the midst of some dozen men, who were grouped about the barn. A word or two from Reichner quieted all suspicion, and I was warmly received and given a seat, and a hunch of bread to eat. They were in the middle of a meeting to discuss their wrongs and their hopes of redress, and I listened with deep interest to the piteous tales of cruelty and oppression, for religion's sake, which these men poured out to each other. Most of them, like Master Reichner, were outlaws and excommunicated, living from hand to mouth, and daily risking their lives for their faith. They spoke passionate words, some of them, especially the younger ones, and declared that God would recompense their

enemies and make His own cause triumph; but the older ones shook their heads.

"The ways of the Lord are not as our ways," said one old man, rising to his feet; "He wills that we shall suffer patiently and forgive our enemies, and it may be that we shall never see our desires fulfilled. I firmly believe that the light *will* break over the land, but it will not be in our day. Our duty is to endure silently and be faithful. What think you, Master Reichner?"

My friend hesitated a moment, struggling with the desire of a strong spirit to fight and combat the wrong, rather than patiently suffer it. At last he spoke. "My friends," he said, "I believe that we have no right to retaliate or avenge ourselves. I believe that God is strong enough to do that for us. Our part is to hold fast to the truth, and to do our duty. But I must say this, that should the oppression become unbearable I cannot believe that we should be doing wrong to take up arms under a worthy leader, and fight for our faith and our liberties."

A murmur of disapproval came from the older men, but the rest, myself included, heartily agreed with the young pastor. The discussion was continued for some time, and then, after a short prayer, the little meeting dispersed, and the men turned out into the snow. I lingered behind the rest to speak to Master Reichner, who was the last to leave.

"I hope you will pardon my intruding myself into your meeting like this," I said; "it was quite unintentional, you may be sure."

"No, I am glad you were here," he answered kindly; "I am sure you may be trusted not to repeat what you have heard, and I have been hoping I should see you again."

"How are your hurts?" I asked, as he paused.

"Oh, they are quite healed, thank you; they were only slight flesh wounds. But now, about yourself. How are you getting on at Kolin? If you have time, sit down again for a few minutes and tell me all the news."

I did as he desired me, and very soon he had heard the whole story of my troubles, and already my heart felt lighter for having told him. He sat quite silently for a minute after I had finished, stroking his moustache, and gazing thoughtfully at the bare rafters.

"You have been through your first battle," he said presently, "and it is harder and less glorious than you expected. Is it not so?"

"Yes, indeed," I answered mournfully; "I think I shall give it up altogether and run away."

Master Reichner smiled.

"I know that feeling well," he said; "it seems as if every effort took us further away from our aim, instead of nearer. The world is very hard and unsympathetic, and we feel misjudged and injured."

"Exactly," I said, as he paused.

"May I give you a bit of advice? Well, then, use discretion, and *do* instead of talking. In these days action is better than words. There are so many to catch up our words and use them against us, even among our own friends; but a quiet Christian *life*

cannot but command respect. Try and be helpful at home, obedient to your parents, diligent at school, earnest in play, watchful over your temper. That will do more good than boasting that you are one of the Reformed, and that you hold a purer faith than your neighbours. Are you vexed at my plain speaking?"

"No," I answered, "you are certainly right, and I am wrong. But you see I wanted not to be ashamed of my belief, and to uphold it before everyone, so that there might be no mistake as to what I was."

"Yes, I am sure you meant to do right," Master Reichner said warmly; "and you will succeed if you go on. Do not be discouraged. Of course you did wrong to strike young Paulus, but you have repented of that, and it will be a reminder to you in future. If you get but little sympathy at home just now, why, surely you are man enough to fight your battles alone. Alone—no, I should not say that, for you know where you can get a Friend."

"I am not sure whether I do know that

part of it," I was obliged to confess; "it was you who stirred me up to want to be one of the Reformed. It was partly because I liked you that I have stuck to it so far. I do not feel any nearer to God than I did a month ago."

"Why, you foolish fellow, do you expect to be a full-grown Christian in a month? I am only the merest babe as yet, though I have been striving after Him for years."

"But that is very discouraging," I said.

"Nay, I think the babe's place is the happiest; it has only to live and love and trust its Father. I do not mean that we are not to strive to love God better, but love cannot grow in a day, and you will have to learn to know God a little before you can love Him."

"How am I to love Him? How am I to know Him?" I asked rather hopelessly.

"How does a child get to love its mother? Not by a violent effort of will, but just naturally. If you try to please Him, your love will grow, and you will find how good He is."

We sat silent for a few moments, while the twilight deepened round us, until we could scarcely see each other's faces.

"Put God first," my companion said at last; "put Him in the first place, and self last, then you will not find it hard to love Him. If we are always thinking about a person and trying to serve him, we get to love him unconsciously. How much more when it is the Lord, who has given us everything, so many blessings!"

"*You* have not very many blessings," I said a little doubtfully; "you are hunted about, excommunicated, always in want and peril."

"I don't think danger has the same terrors for me that it has for some people," he answered simply; "I am so used to it from boyhood, and I almost enjoy the sense of risk. I have no one now to care much what happens to me, which makes a lot of difference. When it is only one's own life, it does not so much matter."

Though he spoke so quietly, I could see that there was some past sorrow hidden under

his words; but I would not intrude upon it, so I was silent for a moment. When I thought over it, however, I could not help bursting out:

"Do not say nobody cares. *I* care, though I am only a good-for-nothing boy, I know."

"Thank you," he said, holding out his hand; "I think we shall be friends, you and I."

"You may be *my* friend, but I fear I can never be yours: I am so much younger than you."

"Not so very much. I am not thirty-four yet," he added, smiling.

"I wonder if I shall be as good as you by the time I am thirty?" I said.

"A great deal better, I should hope. Now we must say farewell, for the night is coming on fast, and you have some way to go home."

"Where shall you spend the night?" I inquired.

"Here. I shall have most luxurious quarters — as snug and warm as possible, with this straw to lie upon."

"I wish I could stay here, too, and keep

you company," I said, as we grasped one another's hands.

"What would your mother and that pretty little sister of yours say? No, indeed, you must get home as fast as you can, and I hope you will not lose your way. I will come with you to the edge of the wood."

In spite of my remonstrance he opened the door, and we went out together into the darkness and the snow.

CHAPTER III.

"IN ALL TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION."

IT was night when I reached home, after a hard battle with the snow. I found my mother very anxious about me, and my father was really angry with me for staying out so late on such a wild evening.

"You might have been buried in a snow-drift," he said, "and cut off in your sins."

I answered, with as much gentleness as I could command, that I had been to a meeting of the Reformed, that I had seen Master Reichner, and that it was through staying to converse with him that I had been delayed; and my father was somewhat mollified by this account of my proceedings.

"Well," he said, "the young pastor is a godly man, and a good friend for you; but

another time endeavour, my son, to have a little consideration for the anxiety of your mother."

I promised to be more careful in future; and when Wilma and I were dismissed, I told her all about my adventures, omitting, however, most of my talk with Master Reichner.

She was deeply interested, and in her turn she had news to communicate.

"After you went out, Hugh," she said, "two priests came here with an order from the Town Council to search the house for what they call heretical writings."

"Did they find any?" I asked eagerly.

"No, for fortunately all our books were safely put away in the hiding-place where Master Reichner took refuge. Oh, Hugh! fancy if they had taken the great Bible, or Master Luther's treatises, or——"

"You foolish child!" I said, "the danger is not to the books, but to us. Do you not see that if any had been discovered they would have had an excuse to arrest my father?"

"Ah!" she said, shuddering, "we seem to be living on the very edge of a precipice, and

there is no knowing how soon we may fall over!"

"You must keep up heart, Wilma," I said, as encouragingly as I could. "Think how long we have been safe, while others have been taken. Besides, if it has to come, why should you make your life miserable by dreading it beforehand? They shall not hurt you if *I* can help it."

"Dear Hugh, I always feel safer when you are at home," she whispered, which made me feel so pleased that I volunteered to kiss her—a most unusual favour on my part.

The next few days were quiet and uneventful, but there was a sense of coming trouble in the air of which I, boy as I was, could not but be aware.

I got on better at school after the first tide of disgrace had swept over me, and I was quite hoping to regain the place I had hitherto held as leader in all sports and pastimes. Following Master Reichner's counsel, I was careful not to parade my religious views before my companions, and yet at the same time not to be ashamed of them. Even my father

began to give me a little more credit for trying to do right; and altogether I was happier in myself than I had been for some time.

Then it was that the storm broke.

One evening when I came home from school and knocked at the front door, no one opened it to me. I rang a peal on the large bell, but there was no response; so I went round to the back door, which I found open. I was afraid, by this time, that something must have happened, so I ran upstairs to the parlour where my mother usually sat. It was empty. I went all over the house, calling "Elspeth," "Wilma," till I was hoarse. At last, in despair, I went up to our little attic chamber, which was somewhat shut off from the rest of the house, and there, seated on a low chair, with Wilma at her feet, I found my mother. She was very pale, and they had both been weeping.

"Mother!" I cried, in alarm, "what is it? What has happened?"

"They have taken your father to prison—taken him away from us all," she answered in a passion of grief.

"On what charge?" I demanded fiercely.

"Alas! on the charge of heresy; and they say there is little hope of his release. Oh, my husband! Why did they not take me too?"

"Yes, why are we not all arrested as well?" I asked; but my mother did not heed me, as she rocked to and fro, moaning piteously to herself.

"Master John Peters is taken as well," Wilma whispered. "They have carried them to the fortress, where so many of our friends are."

She spoke calmly, poor child, scarcely seeming to realize what this news meant to our father, and to us all. I was half stunned by it, for though we had dreaded this for so long, it seemed as if it could not really have come to pass.

"And you and mother, Wilma—what did they say to you?"

"They said women were not worth taking, but that Master Werner had a son who would share his father's fate in a few days if he were not careful."

I could not help feeling a sort of pride,

even then, that they thought me worth dealing with—that they recognized me as one of the Reformed, and as almost a man.

"Yes, my son," my poor mother said, raising her head, "*you* are in danger now, for you have made it no secret at the school what you believe."

"I am not ashamed of my belief, mother."

"No, but we can ill spare you, and yet it is not safe for you to stay in Kolin any longer. Ah, what can we do?"

"I cannot leave you and Wilma alone and unprotected," I replied. "I dare say they will not really think me worth the trouble of arresting, and my duty is to stay with you."

"It would be the greatest comfort to have you," said my mother, "but we must not think of anything but your safety. We are only women, and they will not harm us; whereas you——"

"I shall stay for the present, at all events," I replied resolutely; "but if I hear any definite news that I am in danger, I will see about escaping."

My decision seemed a relief to the dear souls, who now had only me to lean upon. We talked long and earnestly about my father's danger, and what would be our most prudent course; but at present all seemed too bewildering and terrible for definite plans to be made. Those who were imprisoned for their faith were only allowed to see their friends by special favour, so we had little hope of often visiting our father, though we might be permitted to send him clothes and food, which he would sorely need.

Ah, what a time that was! How well I remember the long dreary days, when we lived on as usual, with the constant sorrow and anxiety in our hearts. I went to school and joined in the games just as before, but with little spirit or interest. Not only was there the trouble about my father, but we never knew how soon I too might lose my liberty. Every morning as I left home I used to look back, feeling that it might be my last chance of seeing the dear old house; every evening as we knelt in prayer my mother offered up thanks that I was still

left to them. I think I must have grown much older in those weeks, for they all seemed to lean on me and seek my counsel as if I had been really a man, and not a mere lad of sixteen.

We parted with one of the servants, retaining only old Elspeth, a faithful but timid member of the Reformed Church. My mother's one great interest in life was preparing food and little delicacies to send to my father in his prison, but soon even this was denied to her. The authorities became more strict, and increased the privations of their prisoners to such a degree that many of them fell sick. We were thankful to hear that my father long remained in good health, but at last we were told that he had been smitten with fever, and that there was small hope of his recovery. My poor mother went to the prison, and implored them to let her see her husband, but all in vain. They drove her away, calling her a vile heretic, and uttering fresh threats against her son.

Then there came a terrible day, when the

news was brought us that my father had been set free by a higher power than that of Rome, and called home to receive his martyr's crown.

I had come home earlier than usual, for there was a holiday in honour of a saint's day, and we three, my mother, Wilma, and I, were sitting in the parlour, talking together, as we generally did then, of my father and of our other friends who were in prison with him. Suddenly old Elspeth burst into the room, wringing her hands and sobbing violently. My mother started up, clutching the back of her carved oak chair for support, and I seized Elspeth's arm and asked what was the matter.

"Alas, alas!" she sobbed, "it is all over. My poor dear mistress!"

"Elspeth, tell us plainly," I said entreatingly, for my mother was growing whiter every moment; "tell us what you have heard."

"The master is dead—dead in prison, away from his wife and children," she said between her sobs.

"How did you hear?" I demanded, with a lingering hope that it might be a false report.

"Hans Schneider, who supplies the gaoler with bread, heard it this very morning. He died of the fever, alas! alas!"

My mother gave one cry, and then fell forward senseless on the floor. Half stunned myself by this awful blow, I lifted her up and bore her to a couch, while Elspeth and Wilma sobbed aloud. She recovered consciousness in a few minutes, but she seemed too much overpowered by grief either to move or to utter a word. For myself I could not realize till much later that we were indeed fatherless, and my mother was a widow.

The need for action kept me from that realization for a while, and I took my mother to her room, and soothed Wilma almost as if it were only *their* sorrow, and not also my own. The neighbours came in quietly to condole with us; good Mistress Müller, whose husband had till now been spared, offered to stay and comfort my

mother in her sorrow. There was much to do and to think of, and I went myself to the prison, regardless of consequences, to make quite sure of the sad truth, and to ask for my father's body for burial. This was denied me. The heretic's body would be burned in the market-place, they said, as a warning to others.

Sickened and horrified, I went home, resolving, if possible, to keep this, the worst part of all our sorrow, secret from mother and Wilma. It was not till the house was quiet for the night, and that I found myself alone in the dark parlour, that I began to realize what our loss was. I sat by the window, my head buried in my hands, while slowly the awful consciousness of it all came over me. I should never see my father or hear his voice again; I should never be able to show him how much I wished to please him. He was dead—dead, and that through the malice of cruel and bigoted men. A burning torrent of passion overcame me. I started up, with clenched hands, vowing eternal vengeance on his murderers; I would shoot

Father Kanitz and all the rest who had sha in the crime; I would get all the Reformed rise in a body and tear down their houses. They should not add the cruelty of burning our beloved corpse in the market-place. I hated them, and I would let them know it! What right had they to kill an honest man merely for a difference of religious belief? Why did God allow such things? How could He be a God of love? And I, in my impotent fury, even dared to blaspheme my Maker, and charge Him with the awful deed.

Then, at the height of my passion, I stumbled in the dark against my father's own chair, where he had sat ever since I could remember, and where he would never sit again. My anger changed to grief, and as I sank on my knees by the old chair, a storm of tears and sobs shook me all over, and I could only moan out "Father!"

I think my feeble cry after an earthly father must have reached my Father in heaven, for He took pity on me, and sent me quiet sleep to calm my exhausted, turbulent heart.

In the morning Elspeth found me there, resting against the old chair, and breathing as gently as if no great storm had shaken my life to its foundations.

CHAPTER IV.

PARTINGS.

THE next day I persuaded my mother to stay in bed, and Wilma remained with her a great deal, so that neither of them heard what was the talk of the town—that my father's body was to be solemnly burned that afternoon. Poor body! They might do their worst on *it*, for the soul had escaped them. I learned afterwards that there are worse things than public indignity to the dead—a hundred times worse. I kept indoors all day, and had the windows all closed, hoping that my mother would not suspect anything unusual. They told me that a large crowd collected in the market-place, where a heap of faggots had been erected, and that a procession of priests appeared, with the town officers bearing my father's body. After a

long harangue from Father Kanitz, it was placed on the pile, which was set alight, and before long only a few ashes remained of him who had been one of the kindest fathers and most respected citizens of Kolin.

This was Rome's revenge for the crime of dying a natural death, and escaping almost painlessly from her grasp. The crowd looked on in silence for the most part, but one daring fellow cried in a loud voice, as the smoke rose up to heaven: "The Lord will judge these murderers!" Search was made for him, but he could not be identified.

In the evening, when the town was once more quiet and the market-place empty, Mistress Müller came in to see us. I begged her not to mention the events of the day, and before she went up to my mother's room she agreed not to do so.

I left the three women together, and returned to the empty parlour, which looked desolate and gloomy in the twilight. Intervening buildings shut out the sunset, and a chilly evening mist rose up from the street; so I closed the window, put a fresh log on the fire,

and sat down by the table. It grew darker, but I did not care to get a light, and sat on, thinking sadly about our great sorrow. Suddenly I heard a cry from upstairs, a scuffle and a murmur of voices, and I ran up the stairway to my mother's room to see what was the matter. I found Mistress Müller in great consternation. All unwittingly, quite unintentionally, she assured me, almost with tears, she had let slip the dreadful fact of the scene in the market-place, and my mother had insisted on hearing the whole. At the close of her narration she found that my mother had once more swooned away. It was long before we could bring her round, for the shock had been a terrible one to my mother's overstrained nerves, and she seemed to have little wish to come back to life. For two or three hours she lay with closed eyes and spoke no word, while Wilma and I sat on into the night beside her bed. Good Mistress Müller, after doing what she could for us, went home full of remorse and sympathy; and old Elspeth, worn out with trouble, slept in her chair by the kitchen embers. The house was silent

and lonely, and the only sounds to be heard were the sighing of the wind and the patter of the rats in the wainscot. My sister and I did not talk much, though I did my best to comfort her, speaking at intervals in a low voice, so as not to disturb the silent figure on the bed. At last Wilma's tired eyelids drooped, and she fell asleep in her chair, leaving me to keep my watch alone.

I was too near the great realities of life and of death, of sorrow and of parting, to care much about the dreariness of the desolate house. I scarcely heeded the moaning of the wind and the other eerie sounds which are heard in an old building at night. The clock in the market-place had struck the hour of eleven, when I fancied I caught a creaking sound on the stairs outside the room where I was. I listened somewhat anxiously for a repetition of the same noise, and again I heard a sound as of someone ascending the stairs slowly and cautiously. Then came a knock at the door, a gentle knock, which did not rouse either of the two sleepers within, but which made a cold shiver pass

over me. I was not without some old superstitions, and for a moment I believed that my father's spirit had revisited us, as a warning of evil to come. But I soon conquered this feeling, and went forward to open the door, prepared for either spirit or man. Out on the dark landing, wrapped in a long cloak, I saw a tall, upright figure; and then a well-known voice greeted me in a low tone:

"Hugh, lad, I have come to see you. Will you let me in?"

I could scarcely repress my joy at hearing a friendly human voice, and grasped Master Reichner's strong, warm hand.

"You have heard everything?" I asked.

"Yes, so I came to see if I could be any help to you or your mother," he replied.

It was almost the first time since my father's death that I had been able to talk to another man who was wise and strong enough to help me. I drew him into the chamber and shut the door, while he looked pityingly at my two sleeping charges. Then we sat down in the shadow and talked in whispers, he telling how he had been at the market-place

in disguise that very afternoon, and had seen, to his surprise and horror, the public burning of my father's body; while I, in my turn, confided to him all the trouble and anxiety of the past few days. There was something about Master Reichner's sympathy which differed from any other that I have ever met with. He did not merely pity, but he felt *with* us, and he had proved it by running the risk of coming to see us. He did not say much about the inscrutable decrees of Providence and the sinfulness of repining, for he saw my heart was too sore for that; but in one or two simple, straightforward words he told me of his sympathy, and of God's sympathy, and of how the Father loves us all the more when He sends trouble to us.

"It is worse for you than for your father," he said; "he only had a short time in prison, and then was taken home. You have the sorrow and the danger and the anxiety still with you; but just as God comforted him, He will comfort you. He *can* comfort you, Hugh, if you will only let Him."

"But what can I do with mother and

Wilma?" I asked, after a pause. "I may be arrested any day, and then they will have no one. They are so little able to bear suffering and danger."

"Women are safer than men in these days, but of course it is right for you to think of some plan for them in case of your arrest. Have you any friends who would take charge of them?"

"Herr Müller is very kind," I said; "but he has a family of his own. Besides, my mother would not accept charity."

"It is not charity that she wants, so much as care and tenderness," said Master Reichner, looking sadly towards her.

At that moment she opened her eyes, and I hastily stepped towards her to explain who the stranger was, that she might not be startled.

"It was kind to come," she said feebly, holding out her hand.

Then Master Reichner drew a chair to the bedside and talked to my mother gently, as one might speak to a child who is ill. He did not dwell on the horrors of death, but

led her mind away to the happy side, the freedom from pain, the martyr's crown. His voice soothed and comforted my mother inexpressibly, and a restful look came over her face as she listened.

"I shall not be very long away from him," she said at last, looking wistfully at me and at Wilma, who was still asleep. "My dear children—they will be alone in the world. Mistress Müller tells me she will take care of Wilma, but Hugh——"

"Do not fear for me," I said; "I am sure I shall find some place to go to."

"Mistress Werner," broke in the pastor, "if Hugh is willing to take to a life like mine —a life of danger and privation, but of much happiness as well—let him come with me. I will take care of him, and treat him as my brother."

"Yes, yes," I exclaimed eagerly, "let me go with him, mother. I should be so happy, and he will help me to do right."

"But all the dangers, my son, the constant perils."

"I am in danger now, mother, and I

may be arrested at any time. With Master Reichner I shall be far safer than here. But, oh, mother, do not speak of dying! You must live for our sake, for poor little Wilma's sake!"

She smiled faintly.

"I feel as if I had no more strength to live," she answered; "now that my beloved husband is gone before, I cannot stay here any longer." Then, looking up into the strong, noble face beside her, she said suddenly: "Yes — take my boy, Master Reichner. You will take care of him and teach him as his father would have done. I am so weary now—I will try to sleep." And she turned over and closed her eyes quietly.

"Come away," I whispered, choking down a sob, and Master Reichner followed me out on to the dark landing.

"Do you think she is really dying?" I asked hoarsely, catching hold of his cloak.

"Yes, Hugh, I think she is right, her strength is all exhausted. Oh, my poor fellow, you are indeed having sore trials!"

"I shall still have Wilma—and you," I said,

trying to keep back my tears, for I could not let him think me unmanly.

"I promise you, on my honour, Hugh, to be a faithful friend and brother to you as long as I am able; but what am I compared to your parents?"

I could not answer, so he grasped my hand, and promising, if it could be done, that he would return next evening, he went quietly out of the house, and I was once more left alone. I returned to my mother's chamber, and found Wilma awake; so I drew her away from the bed, and, as gently as I could, told her about Master Reichner's visit and what we had arranged. She listened awestruck and silent, but she made no objections, and seemed not to take in this fresh sorrow.

We watched by my mother all night, and as the day began to dawn a change came over her face. She opened her eyes again, and signed to us to come to her bedside. I tried to put some nourishment to her lips, but she would not take it, and I saw that the end was very near. Wilma kissed her in a grave, quiet way, without shedding any tears, and I held

her thin hand in mine while I tried to repeat such verses from the Bible as I thought might comfort her. At last she said, "Farewell," very low, and was gone before we could speak again. We still sat beside her, for I was not sure whether Wilma understood that all was over, and I could not bear to tell her; but my sister looked at me steadily and whispered:

"She is gone, Hugh." I bent my head silently, and laid the hand I had been holding on the bed.

"Come here, Wilma," I said, for her silence and self-restraint were unnatural. She came over to me, and I put my arms round her and took her on my knee, while I felt her chest heaving with the pent-up sobs which were coming. "Yes, cry, poor dear," I said; "do not try to keep it back any longer." She laid her head on my shoulder, and gave way to a burst of weeping which relieved her, while I stroked her hair, and thought sadly that I was now the only person who belonged to her, and that we must so soon be parted.

Elspeth came upstairs early in the morning, and saw at once what had happened. She

sent Wilma and me away while she prepared the dear body for its last rest. I was much perplexed as to the funeral, for as a heretic my mother might not have Christian burial, and yet I could not bear that she should be dishonourably laid to rest. Happily, Master Müller happened to come in during the morning, so I asked his advice on the subject.

He said that I must communicate with the authorities, and ask permission to bury her outside the town, so I went, sadly enough, to the proper official with my request. He demurred for a little, and then gave leave, on condition that no service was held over the grave; and I went back to our darkened house, which was of course confiscated on my father's death, and therefore might at any time be seized. All that could be done was done very quickly and quietly. The proper officials came, and late that afternoon a very simple little funeral procession passed down the street and out of the city gate. I was the only mourner, for Wilma stayed at home, poor child, with Elspeth. They had dug a grave in a waste place outside the town, a dreary spot

enough in which to lay one's beloved dead; but when I thought of my father, I was content that it should be even as it was. After the grave was filled up, and I had paid the men, I knelt down in the twilight and said a prayer in a cold, dead sort of way, just because I felt that it was right to do so. I could not realize that it was well with my mother, and that her spirit was alive and at peace. The material, visible side of it all was so present with me, that the heavenly side seemed unreal and far away. It was past sunset when I set off to return home, and the gate was being closed as I reached the wall. As I walked along the street towards our house, I felt a touch on my arm, and I caught sight of one of my schoolfellows, with whom I had once been very friendly.

"Hist! Werner, he said in a low voice, "I advise you to look about you. You are to be arrested to-night or to-morrow morning as a heretic. Never mind how I heard; but it is true."

"Thank you heartily, Rudolph," I said, as he passed carelessly on, and then a deadly

chill came over me, for in my sorrow I had quite forgotten this danger, and now it stared me full in the face. By this time to-morrow I might be in prison! I was safe nowhere, not in the street—certainly not at home. But there was no time to be lost, and I walked quickly to the house, ran up to Wilma's room, and knocked at the door.

"Wilma," I said, "put on your hood and cloak, and take anything you value, for you must come to Master Müller's at once."

"What, to-night? Oh, Hugh, when it was but this morning that mother——"

"Listen," I said; "it is absolutely needful, for I may be taken at any time. I will tell you while you get ready—or stay, I must see Elspeth."

I left my sister to collect her things, and found the old servant in the kitchen. I explained as briefly as I could that our household must be broken up at once, and I gave her as much money as I could spare from the little store my mother had had, telling her to find some place in which to lodge until she should decide what to do. The good creature

was much distressed, less for herself than for me, and she did not want to take my money, saying, "You will need it, poor lad, for yourself and the little maiden." After taking leave of her I went back for Wilma, whom I found already hooded and cloaked, with a little bundle in her hand.

"Now, bid farewell to Elspeth," I said, "and then come with me."

She ran to the kitchen, and in a few moments reappeared, and we went out together into the street, which was almost dark by this time. There were but few people about, and the Müllers lived close by, so we reached their house safely. The good people were quite willing to take charge of Wilma, and Mistress Müller gave her a hearty kiss of welcome as she saw the tear-stained face and sorrowful eyes of my poor little sister. Then we had one close embrace, and she sobbed out entreaties that I would take care of myself and come back to her soon.

"What are you going to do yourself, boy?" Herr Müller asked, laying his hand kindly on my arm, as I stood in the doorway.

"Join Master Reichner as soon as possible, and leave Kolin at once," I replied.

"God speed you, then, and spare your life! We will take all care of the little sister."

He wrung my hand, and I left him, turning out into the cold, gray twilight with a feeling of unutterable loneliness and desolation. Well, at all events, Wilma was safe, at least as long as the Müllers remained unmolested; my mother was laid in a quiet grave, and old Elspeth was provided with a little money for her support. As for myself, I did not know what would become of me. I meant to remain in the house that night in case Master Reichner came, when I should escape with him; if he did not appear, I would attempt to steal out of the town and take refuge in the barn where I had been for the meeting. I found the house empty and deserted; for Elspeth, doubtless disliking being alone in the place, had packed up her few little possessions and gone off.

Of all the sad hours in my life I think that the last evening I spent in my old home was the most desolate. I dared not show a light

for fear of attracting my enemies; the fires were all out, and a chilly, damp feeling pervaded the building, which, added to the darkness, and to the scarcely defined fears which a recent death in a house causes to even a moderately superstitious person, were intensely depressing. I felt my way to my father's desk, where I knew he used to keep his money, and, by the aid of my knife, I forced it open, and found a small bag of gold in a drawer. This I thrust in my pocket without much thought, and then, closing the desk, I went to my own room, and put together a few of my more needful articles of clothing in a bundle. It was slow work, feeling my way from closet to chest and chest to closet; but at last I had found all I wanted which it would be possible to carry in a hurried flight, and now nothing more remained to be done.

I next went to the room from which opened the little secret chamber, and I tried the spring of the sliding door to make sure that it would be all right in case of need. The silence and ghostliness of the house were oppressive.

There was scarcely a sound except my own stealthy footsteps as I moved from room to room; it was a calm night, so there was not even a wind to whistle through cracks and windows. And yet I had an undefined feeling of danger approaching; how near or how far off I could not tell. At any moment I might hear the footsteps of the men who were coming to take my liberty; and each moment seemed an hour. I sat in the parlour facing the door which led on to the stairs, straining my ears for any sound to break that awful tomb-like silence. A flicker of light from a window in a neighbouring house caught the face of the old clock, which no one had wound up, and I made out the hands to be at four o'clock. The clock in the market-place struck eight. Only eight! and I might have four hours or so longer in this suspense and loneliness! It was midnight when Master Reichner came the night before. I could hardly bear it, and I walked up and down to keep my heart up, repeating a mechanical prayer for help, but too intently listening to realize what I was saying.

Which would it be, my friend or the enemies? Would it be the one footstep or the many?

There! what was that? No; only a board creaking in the room below. I sat down again by the window and looked out into the darkness, but saw nothing except the twinkling light opposite, and the dim outlines of the houses.

CHAPTER V.

OUT INTO THE WORLD.

AS I sat listening in the darkness I heard a slight noise downstairs, and soon after a stealthy footstep ascended to the door of the room where I was. I was just about to spring forward with an exclamation of relief, confident that it was Master Reichner come to my rescue, when the door opened, and a much smaller figure entered. Seeing at once that it was not my friend I stayed where I was, hidden from view behind a curtain, and able dimly to make out the intruder's movements. He came across the room close to where I was, and I saw by the light of a small horn lantern which he carried that he was a short, evil-looking man, very poorly clad, and armed with a dagger. Strange as it may seem, in spite

of my disappointment and his repulsive appearance, I actually was glad that he was there, to relieve the intense loneliness I felt. He moved about cautiously, opening a cupboard and picking up now and then some article, which he examined as carefully as the darkness would permit.

At last he reached my father's desk, and raised the lid eagerly. I heard him feeling about for the drawers and passing his hand over the papers, and before long there was a chink of money. I had evidently left a little of the money behind, which he was delighted to discover.

Apparently this man was a thief, who, finding the house empty, was helping himself to anything of value which he could discover. I hesitated whether to come forward and charge him with his theft, running the risk of a blow from his dagger, which would effectually do the work of the Town Council. Then I decided that, since I did not want the things he was taking, and it would be a risky encounter for an unarmed boy like myself, I had better stay where I

was, and let him continue his work of plunder unmolested. It was as well that I did so, for only a minute later I heard the heavy knock at the door which I had been expecting all the evening, and I knew that they were come to arrest me. My difficulty now was how to reach the hiding-place behind the tapestry without attracting the attention of the thief, who was still busy at the desk. But that worthy, who did not wish to be discovered by the officers of justice, saved me some trouble by darting out of the room and hurrying down the back staircase. I hastily entered the secret chamber behind the tapestry, wondering whether the hurried flight of the thief would put my enemies on the wrong track. I heard footsteps all round my prison: in the parlour outside, then in the bedroom above, then in the kitchen below. Someone pulled aside the tapestry which hung before the door of my hiding-place, and exclaimed:

"This should conceal some door, I'll warrant!"

Fortunately, however, the sliding panel was

so constructed that it was not distinguishable from the rest of the wall, and, although the light of their torches came to me through a crack when the tapestry was lifted, I could not be seen by them. A heavy blow on the wall close to me gave me a moment's fright; but apparently the sound was less hollow than it seemed to me, and no notice was taken of it. I heard a voice say:

"What is the use of wasting our time over a young rascal like this? Why, the boy's only sixteen or seventeen—not worth turning out for on a cold night like this!"

"Control your fool's tongue!" growled another. "He's a heretic, and we're under orders. Come up to——"

And the voices died away for a time, though I soon heard someone, evidently in authority, saying:

"The fellow must have made off when we arrived. Why was not a watch set at the back door as well as the front? It is useless to stay here any longer."

Then followed a sound of feet descending the stairs, and once more the house was silent

as the grave. After waiting for some time I cautiously emerged from my hiding-place, and looked about me to make sure that no lurking spies remained. But silence and darkness reigned supreme, so I took off my shoes and stole part of the way downstairs to reconnoitre. The front door was open, but, to my horror, I saw that it was guarded by one of the town watch, who had a pipe and a lantern, and seemed to be establishing himself for the rest of the night. The back door also proved to be guarded, so I went back to the parlour to consider my position.

For my own part I was safe enough, at least for the present; but when I thought of Master Reichner I was filled with alarm. He might come at any time, and walk into the lion's mouth; and yet how could I warn him? I had no idea whence he was coming, whether from the country or from some place near by in the town itself. I could do nothing but wait and watch and hope that he might be kept safe, and not be caught through coming to help me.

An hour wore by and I grew intensely

drowsy, for I had been awake all the night before; yet I dared not go to sleep for fear Master Reichner might come. I sat in the window, invisible, I knew, on account of the darkness, straining my eyes and ears to catch a sight or sound of my friend. The stillness and quiet were so long unbroken that I got into a drowsy state, and felt as if nothing more would happen that night. I heard the clock in the market-place strike eleven in a faint, far-away manner; I began to picture, with my eyes shut, how we had sat together in that very parlour on the first night that Master Reichner came—and gradually I fell fast asleep.

I awoke with a start, conscious that I had been very foolish to let myself doze, and yet wondering vaguely why I had woke up.

"Hugh!" said a voice at my ear.

I started to my feet, and felt a warning pressure in the darkness.

"You have come!" I whispered; "how did you pass the door?"

"The man is as sound asleep as you have been," replied my friend; "was it not

rather a risk to choose this window as a couch?"

"I never meant to close my eyes; I came here to watch for you."

"What has happened since last night? Your mother——?"

I told him briefly all that had occurred, and asked him to take me with him, if it would be safe to do so. He said that he had spent that day hidden in the house of a friend; but that it would be best, if possible, to leave the town that very night. The watchman at the back was asleep, and Master Reichner thought we might pass out unperceived, though the exit from the town itself would be more difficult.

"Have you got all you can carry?" he asked.

I produced my modest bundle, which he rather doubtfully agreed to my taking.

"I have left all the books we have in the secret chamber, where I hope they will be safe," I said; "in this bundle I have only a few clothes, but I can leave them if you like."

"No, take them, only if we are hard

pressed you may have to throw them away. Now, are you ready? Follow me then as silently as possible."

He led the way down the stairs, and I followed him as quietly as I could. The man on guard was still asleep and snoring loudly, but he was sitting almost across the threshold, and the door was partly closed. Master Reichner squeezed past him and looked back at me, but a sudden movement on the watchman's part made me slip back into the shadows. The man opened his eyes, yawned, and sat upright. My friend had disappeared, and all I could do was to wait in the hope of another opportune nap, so I sat on the stairs out of his sight and watched him. He wrapped his cloak round him and looked very wide awake for a few moments, but to my great joy he gradually let his head fall and his eyes close, and before long he was asleep again. I seized my opportunity and was soon out in the street, looking round for Master Reichner. All was very dark and quiet, so he might be quite near me without my seeing him. The watchman's lantern shed

a feeble light from the door of our house, but there was no lamp in the street. I went a few steps rather doubtfully, and was much relieved when a shadowy figure appeared at a little distance, which proved to be my friend.

"Ah! That's all right!" he whispered; "now follow me again, and stop when I do. Be ready to step aside into a doorway at any moment."

Then followed a strange walk through the sleeping town, past houses which I knew well enough by daylight, but which seemed unfamiliar in the darkness. My guide knew every side alley and back street, and he led me unhesitatingly. Once we saw a man approaching, and instantly turned aside into a porch, where we both remained until he had passed. I saw that Master Reichner was not going towards the ordinary city gate, but was striking out into the poorer part of the town, where I knew of no means of exit. Still I followed him unquestioningly, up narrow streets, past large and small houses, always keeping the same even pace, until he stopped before a low, humble-looking dwelling,

which had a faint light in an upper window. Master Reichner knocked three times softly but firmly on the door, and soon a voice from within asked through the keyhole:

"Who is there?"

"Are the lamps burning?" said the pastor, without replying to the previous question.

"The oil is still supplied," returned the voice.

"Have you any to spare?" asked Master Reichner, whereupon the door was quietly opened, and a woman said:

"Come in, Herr Pastor, you are welcome."

I followed him into the house, and the woman, having shut the door, led the way down a flight of narrow stairs into a small room where an oil lamp was burning.

"Do you leave Kolin at once, Herr Pastor?"

"As soon as possible. This"—turning to me—"is the son of good Master Werner, who is one of the latest to witness for our faith. We are going to seek the woods for a time, until this present calamity be in a measure overpast."

"Can you not stay and rest awhile?"

"No, I thank you, Mistress Grethe; we must leave the town before morning."

At this the woman took up the lamp and led us through a dark and narrow passage, which wound about and at last terminated in a flight of three or four steps, leading down to a small door. This our guide unlocked, and Master Reichner, thanking her heartily, though in a low voice, passed through, I following closely. The woman shut the door behind us, and we were alone in the darkness.

"Where are we?" I inquired.

"Outside the walls of Kolin," replied my friend, smiling at my perplexity. "That woman is one of us, and she often lets me use the secret passage which leads from her house."

"What a relief to be out of the town!" I exclaimed. "Where are we going now?"

"To the house of another friend," said Master Reichner. "Follow me closely, and do not speak above a whisper."

I obeyed him, and we went without any more words across a flat open space, which I recognized as a piece of waste ground on the

north side of Kolin. He seemed to know it well, and kept on pretty straight across it, at a fast walk. We passed one or two straggling cottages, but there were no lights in their windows; and soon the town lay a mile or more behind us, and I began to breathe quite freely. It was such a relief to be out in the open, away from the atmosphere of suspicion and danger and sorrow in which I had lately lived. We were walking across a piece of hilly country, with many ups and downs in the road, when Master Reichner, who had been very silent hitherto, turned to me and asked:

"When did you have your last meal?"

I thought for a moment and then said:

"At one o'clock yesterday."

"You must be hungry by this time."

I had been too anxious to think of this before, but now I discovered that I *was* hungry, and I was delighted when my companion produced a large piece of bread from his pocket and shared it with me.

"You will often have to put up with hunger and hard fare, Hugh. Are you ready for it?"

"Yes, I think so," I answered. "So long as one has liberty, and enough food to keep one alive, what more can anyone want in these times?"

"Well, I am glad you are beginning cheerfully. My dear fellow," he added, laying his hand on my shoulder, for we were sitting by the roadside, "you are bearing your troubles like a man. I respect you for it."

His kind words and the sense of his sympathy nearly overcame me, and I had to struggle hard to restrain a fit of womanish weeping.

"It seems hard at first to give up everything," he went on. "The joy of the Lord seems far away and unreal just now, doesn't it? But it *will* come to you, Hugh, if you keep on. God never sends suffering without a recompense."

We sat silent for a while, and then he rose and said cheerfully:

"Now, lad, we must go on our way, or we shall have the dawn coming before we are ready for it."

So we set off again, and in half an hour

came to a quiet cottage among some trees, just visible in the pale gray dawn of the early morning.

"This is our place, if the good woman can take us in," said Master Reichner, pointing it out to me.

We knocked at the door, and soon were admitted by the mistress of the house, who had huddled on a few of her clothes at the well-known voice of the young pastor. She welcomed us kindly, and gave us a bed in a small but clean and neat back room. She was evidently used to entertaining strangers at all hours of the day or night, and she offered us some bread and cheese before we lay down. The bed was small for two of us, but we were too weary to complain, and, after all the dangers and adventures of that day and that night, I was thankful enough to get any bed at all. We fell asleep directly, and slumbered peacefully until late the next morning.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

NEXT morning we were up and away, tramping over the frosty ground (for it was a cold season that spring), and trying to warm ourselves by steady exercise. We were bound for Külmwald, a little village where Master Reichner had many friends, and where he thought we might safely stay for two or three weeks. The keen morning air and the rising sun gave me fresh spirits, and, in spite of my recent sorrow, I could not help enjoying the free, open country, and the confidence that here, at least, I was safe from suspicious eyes and the heavy shadow of persecution. My companion talked cheerfully as we went, telling me of his past life, and relating some of his numerous adventures. Naturally I hoped that the like would fall to my lot, and I eagerly exclaimed:

"Do you think we are likely to have a bear-hunt while we are at Külmwald?"

"It is very possible," Master Reichner answered, "for the one I was telling you of took place very near there."

"And if there is we shall go to it?" I asked; and then it suddenly came over me that it was heartless of me to feel eager over anything, so soon after both my parents had been taken from me. I suppose what I felt showed itself in my face, for my friend said kindly:

"It must seem hard to you to come back to ordinary life and interests after all you have been going through. Take all the happiness you can, it will not be wrong, for there is no fear that you will forget those who have been taken from you."

We walked on awhile in silence, and the sun began to melt the little icicles by the roadside, and warm us through and through.

Presently Master Reichner said:

"I should deem it best for us to take assumed names for the present, except when we are with those whom we can fully trust.

Shall we be brothers, Johann and Peter Wisp?"

"Yes," I answered, "right willingly, Master Reichner; but I fear I may forget, and marvel who is meant when I am called Peter!"

"You have not had to answer to as many names as I have. At one time I was obliged to have several aliases at once. In fact, I sometimes forget that I am Max Reichner at all."

"How shall we live when we reach Külmwald?" I asked.

"I shall try to get employment from one of my friends, and you had better do the same. I do not like the plan of taking hospitality and doing nothing in return for it. What say you, Hugh?"

"I agree with you," I answered; "but I have learned no trade, and I know nothing of farming."

"Well, I dare say we shall find some sort of honest work, and then in the evenings, when I can, I shall read and speak to those who will listen."

"You will not want me to speak to them, will you?" I asked in alarm.

"Nay," he said, laughing, "I had not thought of that."

I was greatly relieved to hear him say this, for I had half feared that if I went with my friend it would be my duty to do as he did, and for such work I felt altogether unprepared.

Thus conversing we went on our way until we were fain to stop for very weariness, and we sat down in a wood to rest awhile. The good woman at whose house we had stayed the night before had given us each some bread to eat when we were hungry, and we were now very glad of it.

"How far is it to Külmwald?" I asked, as we thankfully dined off our dry crusts.

"Two leagues or more, and through forest country most of the way," replied Master Reichner; "are you weary yet, Hugh?"

"Oh, no," I answered, "I have many a time walked five or six leagues, and we have a good reason now for putting as great a distance between us and Kolin as possible."

"I have seldom stayed so long anywhere as I have done of late at Kolin," said my companion; "I have been for nearly three

months in and about the town. There are many there who are good enough to welcome me, even at the risk of their liberty."

"Do you often go to Prague?"

"Sometimes; but I have a friend who is so active there that I am not much wanted. I find the work among the villagers and in the scattered hamlets needs looking after more than it does in the large towns."

"Tell me, Master Reichner, do you never long to have a settled home, and to abide in peace?" I asked.

"If it might have been I should have liked it well," he answered quietly; "my parents are dead, and my only sister is in a convent, so I have no claims on me, except those of our Church."

He spoke calmly, but I fancied, as I had done once before, that he meant more than he said. I dared not question him further, and indeed he seemed rather reticent in speaking on the subject. Then we rose and went on our way, passing through a forest of pine trees, where we only met a few charcoal burners, who looked at us half stupidly, but did not

accost us. We reached the village of Külmwald in the afternoon, as the sun was beginning to sink behind the hills, and it was not long before we had been made heartily welcome by a good carpenter, named Hans Welden, who promised to provide us a lodging for as long as we could stay.

Next day he gave Master Reichner employment in his shop, at my friend's own request, and thus enabled him to pay for what he ate. I also found work in driving the horse belonging to a small farmer in the village. I knew a little about horses, so I was not altogether unfitted to have the care of one. Besides this duty, however, I was required to do some quite unaccustomed things, such as milking the cows and feeding the pigs. Though this work was new to me, and not just what I would have chosen, I was glad to get any honest employment; and indeed the farmer thought he showed me no small favour in taking on an ignorant, town-bred boy, who scarcely knew barley from rye. As we were both fully occupied I saw but little of Master Reichner during the day. When-

ever I chanced to meet him he was always cheerful and full of spirits, and seemed in nowise displeased with his lot.

"Well, lad, how are you getting on?" he asked me one day, as I passed him with a big bucket of goat's milk in each hand.

"The work is rather new," I said, "and Mistress Rendl thinks me marvellously slow, I fear."

He smiled at my rueful face, and exclaimed cheerfully:

"Never mind, you will soon get used to it. And," he added in a low tone, "this is better than the prison at Kolin."

Aye, it was better, and I knew that I ought to be thankful; but sometimes when I thought of home and my school-fellows, and all that I had lost, a wave of distaste for my new life swept over me, and, if it had not been for my friend, I know not what I should have done.

In the evenings, however tired he might be, Master Reichner was always ready to go forth to any house where the people were willing to listen to his words. Our host was

one of our faith, and in his large old kitchen we often had meetings, which strengthened all who came, and stirred up fresh faith and courage.

The parish priest of Külmwald was a very old man, and took little heed of what went on in the village, so the truth was very freely spread among the people, and one by one fresh faces would appear at our meetings, and men would come to speak earnestly with Master Reichner about their souls' welfare.

Thus matters went on for three weeks, and, as far as we could see, there was no danger which would compel us at present to leave this quiet harbour.

One feast-day, when all the village had a holiday, my friend and I went forth for a walk, it being a spring day of unusual beauty and warmth.

"Let us go towards the old castle," said Master Reichner; "you have not seen much of this place yet, Hugh."

"I saw the castle in the distance," I said, "but I would gladly see it near."

So we went together out of the village, past the crumbling, neglected church, into fair fields and across shining streams, until we reached the foot of the hill on which stood the castle, the abode of the Lord of Külmwald. The castle was not a very large one, and, as the master was often away, it had fallen somewhat into neglect. A few huts were clustered round the foot of the hill—miserable-looking hovels, where children sported in the mud, and unkempt women watched them from the doors. Master Reichner talked with some of these, and while he was thus engaged I noticed a sound of trampling hoofs coming towards us, and several horsemen rode into view.

"Ah," cried one of the children, pointing to the foremost, "yonder is the Baron himself!"

I saw the man they spoke of; he was a tall, fine-looking fellow, clad in a hunting-suit, and carrying a falcon on his wrist. Those who were with him were apparelled in the same manner, and they had evidently been out on a hawking expedition, and were

now returning to the castle. Their way led them directly past the group of huts, and it so happened that Master Reichner came out of one of them at the very moment when the horsemen were passing. The foremost reined up at sight of him, and the two men regarded each other fixedly. Then the Lord of Külmwald exclaimed:

"By my troth, 'tis my old comrade, Max Reichner!"

"You have a good memory, if I have not escaped it after so long a time," said my friend courteously. "It is fully ten years since I had the honour of fighting by your side, Meinherr Walter."

"Nay, I have not forgotten you, mine old friend, and I trust you will pay me a visit now that you are in this neighbourhood."

"I am no longer a soldier," said Master Reichner, "and, sooth to tell, my fortunes have fallen so low that I have sought work from the village carpenter yonder."

A look of surprise and amusement overspread the jovial countenance of the Baron.

"Ah, that matters not! Come up with us

and feast at my board with the rest. Thou wert ever a brave fighter and a good trencherman. Who is yonder boy?"

"He is my friend and companion, Peter Wisp," said Master Reichner, carefully avoiding my true name, for fear of possible danger to me.

"Well, let him come too. Hans and Ludwig, dismount, and give your horses to these gentlemen."

The pastor hesitated. "Our garb, Sir Baron," he said, "is scarcely befitting your halls. Remember we are but simple artisans."

But the Baron was obstinate, and, in spite of the contemptuous glances of the gentlemen who were with him, he insisted on our mounting the servants' horses, and riding with him up to the castle. As we went up the winding roadway I took note of our companions. The Baron had a broad, good-natured face, and I feared naught from him; but the knight who rode behind him had a sinister and evil countenance, and he looked on us with no small disfavour. The other gentleman pleased me no better, and I noticed

that when the Baron made mention of my friend's name the two looked on each other as if to say, "We know the name; he is not what he seems."

However, we rode on in all friendliness until the castle was reached, when the Baron blew a blast on his horn and the gates were thrown open to receive us. We dismounted in the courtyard and followed our host into the great hall, where a meal was already prepared; but before we partook of it the rest of the company changed their riding-gear, we alone being in our dusty and shabby attire.

Then, when all were ready, the lady of the castle came down from her chamber, together with her young daughter and the ladies of those two knights who had been hawking with the Baron. One of these was the fairest woman I ever saw, tall and queenly, with dark eyes and golden brown hair. She was richly dressed, and seemed hardly more than five-and-twenty; yet a shadow hung over her face, and her eyes had a sad look in them which made me pity her, I scarce knew why.

"My lady," said the Baron to his wife,

"I have brought hither an old comrade of mine, Captain Max Reichner, whom I met by good fortune on the road."

He spoke in a loud, hearty voice, and I saw that his words took effect on two persons in the hall. One was an old priest, who started and gazed earnestly at my friend, the other was the fair lady who had come in with the Baroness. She grew rosy-red, and then very pale, and she clasped her hands tightly together. For his part Master Reichner seemed no less startled and moved. He could scarce summon his wits to greet the Baron's wife; but this was taken for modesty, and passed unobserved. The Baron handed the lady, whom he called "Baroness von Krakyow," to a seat at his right hand, and her husband, the sinister-faced knight, sat by the hostess. I was placed some way lower down the table, between the old priest and a waiting-woman, but I could easily observe what went on higher up the board.

Master Reichner, who was seated beside the other lady guest, looked flushed and

disturbed, and withal excited, yet as if he were putting strong restraint on himself all the while. He seemed perfectly accustomed to a noble board and the society of knights and ladies, and despite his poor raiment he looked fully as lordly as any. I saw that it was not embarrassment at his situation which thus perturbed him, and I could not help glancing across the table to the fair young Baroness von Krakyow who sat facing him. She was as white as a spirit, and she kept her eyes cast down, scarcely speaking a word, and eating almost naught. They never looked at each other, or spoke one to the other; but I was sure, notwithstanding, that they had some knowledge the one of the other. My neighbours did not speak one word to me, so I had full leisure for my observations, which included the old priest by my side. He regarded Master Reichner from time to time with much disfavour, as did also the Baron von Krakyow, and when the tables were lifted, and we of the upper board went out to a grassy pleasaunce behind the castle, those two men

walked together and spoke low and earnestly on some matter of interest to both. And what could so deeply concern alike a war-like Baron and a cunning-faced old priest, as the fact that they had been supping with the well-known young heretic pastor, Max Reichner?

The Lord of Külmwald, who seemed a right hospitable and honest knight, treated my friend with all courtesy, and me kindly, for his sake, when I chanced to come in his way.

The ladies walked along the grassy borders like brightly coloured birds, discoursing together, and Master Reichner and the Baron followed them, the latter vowing good-humouredly that such a fair quarry should not be suffered to escape.

"Ha, Meinherr von Krakyow!" he exclaimed, intercepting the conference between the knight and the priest; "prithee leave Father Ulrich, and join yourself with us awhile. Take you my wife and walk with her, and I will try my skill to persuade the Lady Sigismunda to accept my escort.

Reichner, let me present you to the Baroness von Krakyow."

He would not be gainsaid, but paired off the company after his own pleasure, and they paced the grass walks in couples, following the one after the other. I was appointed to be squire to the little Lady Gertrude, the Baron's daughter, and a very vivacious and blithesome maiden she was, setting me at my ease at once, and talking gaily on all sorts of subjects. I fancied that the sour-faced Baron von Krakyow was but ill-pleased to see that his wife was in the company of the heretic pastor; but I had no time to heed others, being wholly engrossed with the Lady Gertrude, whose like for wit and brightness I had never met. Once released from the restraint of our elders' presence, we conversed very freely; and if I had but been better attired, I should have felt more entirely her equal and less of a burgher's son, whom in her heart of hearts she must despise.

Only once did I overhear a word of the conversation between Master Reichner and

the Baroness von Krakyow, and that was entirely by chance as they passed us beneath the trees.

"Eva," he was saying very earnestly, "you *must* not feel——"

And they went on.

I was somewhat startled to hear my friend speak thus to this lady, and I hoped that the Lady Gertrude had not noticed it, for she was talking herself, and telling me of a hawking party to which she had been the week before. If she did hear it, she said naught about it, and finished her tale quite unconcernedly.

As the sun was setting we all returned to the castle, and there I perceived the Baron von Krakyow call his host aside and whisper somewhat in his ear. His answer was loud enough for all to hear who stood near.

"And if he be a heretic pastor it matters not to me. I bade him to be my guest, as an old comrade and a good fighter, and I know him to be an honest and true man."

There was no more to be said after that,

but I did not like the look which Krakyow gave my friend as the latter brought in the young Baroness from the pleasaunce.

Master Reichner now signed to me that it was time we should depart, and we therefore with many thanks took our leave of the Lord of Külmwald and his lady, and of their little daughter. Master Reichner just touched with his lips the hand of the Baroness von Krakyow as he had done that of our hostess, and bowed to the other knights and ladies; and then we took our departure, quitting the castle in the twilight, and making our way down the winding road that led towards the village. My companion did not speak a word, and I for a time hesitated to break the silence which he so evidently desired to keep. At last I burst out with a tactless boy's question, which I regretted the minute it was uttered:

"Master Reichner, who was that beauteous Baroness von Krakyow? Did you know her before?"

He turned to me with a look that quieted me.

"Hugh," he said almost sternly, "do not ask me that; at least, do not ask me now."

After that I did not dare to speak to him again, and he walked on with long strides, not seeming to heed where he was going. At the corner where the road turned off to the village he kept straight on, and I ventured to remind him that we were going in the wrong direction.

"It matters not," he said; "go you back, I will follow later."

He spoke in a hard, unnatural voice, and seemed so unlike himself that I feared to leave him; so I kept on after him, only dropping behind that I might not disturb him. The twilight deepened, and the stars came out, and still we continued our strange walk, he looking straight before him, and I watching him anxiously and marvelling greatly.

At last we reached a place where the road ran through a part of the forest, and there it was quite dark, and the spot was as gloomy as anyone could wish to find. Here he stopped, and flung himself down under

a tree, with his face to the ground. I think he had no idea that I was still with him. I drew back a few paces and sat down upon a large stone, just within sight of my friend, though I could see him but imperfectly in the darkness. There was a great stillness in the forest, only broken by the wind swaying the pine trees, and the hoot of an owl overhead. Every few minutes a bat would swoop down close to my face, and once a wolf howled far away in the distance. It was a weird, strange place, and the awe of it was not lessened by the knowledge that only a few yards away from me a fierce battle was raging in a human soul.

I do not know how long my vigil lasted. I grew cold and stiff as the night wind swept round me through the pine trunks; but it never occurred to me to return without my friend. I could hear a smothered groan come from his lips every now and then, and he still lay motionless on the ground with his head on his arms. An intense pity and longing to help him came over me, but there was nothing I

could do. He was alone with his trouble and with God.

After a while he seemed to become more calm, and presently he knelt upright, and I knew that he was praying. I rested my head on my hands, and tried to pray in sympathy with him, but the grim forest, and the silence, and my conjectures so occupied my thoughts that I could not truly pray. He seemed to be wrestling with himself, and crying silently for help, though no words passed his lips. Gradually his kneeling figure took a more restful attitude, as I saw it by a misty moonbeam which struggled through the branches. Then for the first time he spoke aloud: "Not my will, O Father, but Thine. I commit her to Thee."

There was a long silence, and when at last he rose to his feet, his face, though pale and weary, was calm and quiet once more. I was almost ashamed to intrude on him, but he turned, as if slightly bewildered by all he had just gone through, and hesitated which way to take; so I went to him, and laid my hand on his arm.

"Forgive me," I said; "I could not leave you alone. Shall we go back now?"

He started at the sight of me, and then said in his natural voice:

"Yes, lad, we will go back to the village. Are you not cold? It was good of you to wait for me."

"You are icy cold," I said, with my arm in his; "we must walk fast to get warm."

We set off briskly in the darkness, keeping to the road and finding our way easily. Neither of us spoke again till we reached the carpenter's house, where we found everyone had retired to rest; and then at the threshold of our chamber he paused, and said in a low, hurried voice:

"Hugh, I will tell you all about it some day. Till then you must trust me. Good-night, dear comrade."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PASTOR'S DISAPPEARANCE.

THE feast-day being over, all the village returned to work on the morrow as usual, Master Reichner and I among the rest. Neither of us alluded to the events of the previous day, and to all appearances the young pastor was the same as ever—cheerful, hard-working, and self-forgetful. Only I knew the meaning of the dark marks under his eyes, and the anxious look that crept into his face at times. For my own part, I was somewhat uneasy as to his safety, for, from what I had observed at the castle, he had several powerful enemies there who would gladly take the first chance of seizing him. They could scarcely do it openly, since he was under the protection of the Lord of Külmwald himself; but I knew from past experience that our enemies can

readily find means to harm us if they so will. I said naught of my fears to Master Reichner, as I did not wish to allude either to the castle or to its inmates, but I resolved to keep a sharp watch on all strangers who came in my path.

There was a little child, the daughter of one of the village people, who had taken a great liking to Master Reichner, and the day after the feast we heard that she was ill, and kept calling for the pastor. He went to see her at once, and he told me afterwards that her pleasure was quite pathetic. She had kept hold of his hand, and listened eagerly while he told her stories from the Bible, and taught her one or two simple verses. The mother of the child sat near and hearkened to what they said, and when he rose to go she burst into tears, and said she had never heard such words in her life before. They had a talk together, down in the room below, and Master Reichner invited the woman to come to the meeting at our host's dwelling that evening, which she promised to do. My friend seemed almost to forget his own troubles, so

engrossed was he with the people round him, and with the problem of how best he could help them.

That evening, about half an hour before the little meeting was to begin, I saw a horseman ride up to the carpenter's shop, and I dropped the bundle of wood I was carrying and ran forward to see who it was. He was apparently a servant, and he seemed to have ridden fast, for his horse was covered with foam.

"Is the pastor, Master Reichner, here?" he asked, drawing rein.

"Who wants me?" asked the pastor, coming out to the door with a chisel in his hand.

"The Lord of Külmwald sends me to ask you to come to him," said the messenger; "he is taken with a sudden sickness, and is like to die. Therefore he would fain see you."

"Is he at the castle?" asked Master Reichner, laying down his tool and putting on his cap.

"Aye, sir, and sore discomfited. My lady begs you to hasten to him."

"I have no horse, but I will come afoot as soon as I can."

"Nay, sir, take my horse; I can walk."

"I have matters which will keep me here for two hours or so," said Master Reichner; "but then, as you are so urgent with me, I will make all speed up to the castle."

"But, good sir, when my lord lies ill, and calls for you! He was sure you would come to him, if only for the sake of old comradeship; and," he added, lowering his voice, "he would gladly hear somewhat of your religion."

Master Reichner hesitated. Then this last appeal moved him, and he said:

"I will go to the Baron at once."

I came close to him as he left the shop, and entreated him not to be too hasty.

"You have promised to hold a meeting this evening," I reminded him, "and, moreover, I am not any too sure of this messenger. Remember how the Baron von Krakyow looked at you yesterday."

At that name he pulled himself up, and I knew of whom he was thinking.

"Perchance it were wiser not to go," he said. He was thinking not of danger for himself, but of *her* peace of mind.

"Sir," said the messenger, who had dismounted and was leading the horse, "will you mount the beast here?"

"I think it is my duty to go," Master Reichner said, turning to me; "I will return as soon as I can. Tell the people why I am not at the meeting," he added in a low voice, "and, Hugh—will you read to them for me?"

I promised to do so, and ran back to the house to fetch his cloak. In another five minutes he was riding out of the village, and the man was strolling leisurely after him. One of the villagers, who had watched the arrival and departure of the messenger, now came up to me, and remarked:

"That was the servant of the strange baron who rode with our lord the other day. Did you see him? A sour-faced knight as ever I saw."

These words filled me with alarm, and I was certain that evil was intended to the pastor, and that the tale of the Baron's illness was

only a trap by which to ensnare him. But what could I do? I could never overtake him, for he had set forth at a fast trot. I might run after the knave who had brought the message, but he was a tall and powerful fellow, who would be more than my match. Besides, there were already one or two people quietly arriving at the house, and it was time for the meeting. Had I not promised that I would try, in a measure, to take the pastor's place, and read to the little assembly from his Bible? It was with a heavy heart that I turned into the large old kitchen and fetched my friend's Bible from a recess, hidden from view, where he kept it. There were about a dozen people, among them the mother of little Lisa, all sitting quietly in the twilight, waiting for the pastor to appear, and I had to come forward and explain why he was not there. I added that I was sorely uneasy about him, and that I feared treachery was intended, in which they all agreed after hearing my story. Our host, the carpenter, then rose up and said:

"Friends, there can be no doubt that the

pastor is in danger. We can do naught to aid him, save pray God for him. Therefore let us kneel and intercede for him."

We all knelt, and, one after the other, those honest village men prayed aloud with their whole hearts that Master Reichner might be kept from harm and allowed to return safely. I know not when I have joined so earnestly in any prayer as I did that evening in the old kitchen, with the twilight falling outside, and those few faithful men and women round me. We were all in danger ourselves, and they all knew it. Any day might bring the soldiers of the Inquisition down upon them, and this made them all the more united and earnest in the petition that our head and leader might be spared.

After we had prayed, I told them that the pastor's last request to me had been that I should read to them instead of him, and at this a murmur of assent ran through the little group. A rush-light was lit, and I found the fifteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. As I began to read, it came over me with a throng of feelings, What would my father and

mother have thought if they could have known that their careless son was reading the Bible to a gathering of the faithful, and striving faintly to follow their example? When I came to the words, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," I could not help thinking how my father, in the prison at Kolin, had given up his life for God's truth. It was a wonderful chapter, and seemed to meet our needs. "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He will give it you." Did that not include the safety of Master Reichner? Nay, but three verses on I read, "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Yes, that was true, certainly, we were persecuted to the death; and even as I was reading, perchance my friend—nay, I would not put the thought into words. He *must* return: he had so much work still to do for the Church and for God. I read on into the next chapter. "The Comforter," "a little while": the words seemed to quiet my troubled spirit, and the things of heaven grew nearer and more real than ever before.

We had a short meeting that evening, and the people returned quietly to their homes. I stopped little Lisa's mother, to ask her how the child was, and found that she was better, but kept asking still for Master Reichner.

"God knows when he will be able to come and see her again," I said. "He may be safe, but I am afraid this place will soon be too perilous for him. You must pray for his safety, good dame."

And this she promised to do, going away through the darkness with tears in her eyes.

When I found myself standing alone in the village street, with my duty done, and an anxious waiting time before me, my heart began to sink. There was nothing I could do that night, and indeed, even if he were safe, there was small likelihood of his returning before morning; so I could only go to rest, and try to hope for the best. On the morrow, if he did not return, I determined to go in search of him, and with this resolve I fell asleep.

When I awoke in the gray dawn next morning and saw the empty pallet beside

me, I started up, anxious to do something at once, but I soon made up my mind that I must wait awhile. I had my work at the farm to do—the wood to chop, the cows to milk, the horse to feed; and it was but two days since the general holiday, so I had no right to leave my employer so early. Certainly Master Reichner would not approve of that, and, moreover, I ought to wait and see whether he would return during the morning. Therefore I rose up and went to my work, doing it as well as I could, that I might the better ask for leave in the afternoon. I contrived to keep as near the road as possible, that I might see all who entered the village, but Master Reichner did not come, and there were no tidings of him.

As the day wore on my uneasiness grew, and at last, about three of the clock, I craved permission to go forth for a short time, which, being somewhat unwillingly granted, I started out and went boldly up to the castle itself.

Having been admitted, I asked to see the Lord of Külmwald himself, on the principle

that he who dares most, wins most; and without any delay I was conducted to a large chamber, where the Baron sat with his lady on a carven settle covered with rich embroideries. They recognized me at once, and the Baron exclaimed heartily:

"Good-day, younker; how fares it with you and Master Reichner?"

These words, simple and kindly though they were, caused me great sinking of heart, for from them I learned that the Baron knew naught of my friend.

"If it please you, my lord," I said, after saluting them, "I came hither to find Master Reichner, who was sent for last night to the castle."

The Baron shook his head in surprise.

"I sent not for him, boy—what mean you?"

And with that I told my tale, just as it happened, while the Lord of Külmwald listened attentively to what I said.

"This," said he, when I had made an end, "is a vile trick which hath been played in my name, and, worse than all, I know the

man who hath committed this offence against honour and chivalry. Hearken, boy, but be prudent after with your tongue. You saw the Baron von Krakyow who was here two days since? Yesterday he left the castle, saying he was called away on urgent business, and leaving his lady to await him here. He took his three servants with him, and rode forth about noon, promising to return as soon as he had seen those whom he was to meet. Doubtless he hath captured my old comrade by treachery, and delivered him up to his enemies. A heretic, was he? Well, I care naught for that. He was a brave, honest fellow, and if the priests and their ways stick in his throat, who can blame him?"

"And can you do nothing for him, my lord?" I asked anxiously.

"I know not what I can do," he replied; "when my guest returns I will demand an explanation; but 'tis no easy matter to charge a man with treachery in one's own house, and doubtless he will deny any knowledge of the thing."

"If I might speak——" I began diffidently.

"Go on, boy, speak thy mind."

"The father confessor whom I saw here the other day was conversing long with the Baron von Krakyow after we had dined. Perchance he might know of the Baron's intentions?"

The Lord of Külmwald considered a moment; then he said:

"That may be so. I will speak to him, but I doubt Father Ulrich's taking part in such a plot. Well, boy, go thy way. I will do what I can for thy friend; but thou knowest a heretic pastor has small chance when the priests get hold of him."

I thanked him and took my leave, feeling but little comforted by this interview. As I descended the stone stairway I heard a gay voice singing, and at the bottom I found the little Lady Gertrude, with the Baroness von Krakyow.

"Ah, there is that boy, Peter Wisp!" exclaimed the former; "good-day to you, sir! To what do we owe the pleasure of another visit so soon?"

Her words were sarcastic, but her face was

smiling, and I saw she was not really vexed to see me.

"I came to seek my friend, Master Reichner," I made answer, with my cap in my hand; "and since he is not here, I am now on my way back to the village."

"Have you lost him then, Master Peter?"

I scarce knew how much I had better tell her, with that fair, anxious-eyed Baroness beside her, listening to every word.

"He came not home last night when I expected him," I said; "therefore I came to seek him here."

"Why should you think he was here?" asked the Lady Gertrude.

"Because a messenger came to summon him hither," I answered gravely; "and he went off at once, under the belief that the Baron your father was ill, and needed him."

"How curious, how very strange! My father is in perfect health!" exclaimed the little lady in surprise; but her companion understood better the purport of my words, and she caught hold of the oaken balustrade for support. "Doubtless it was some other

sick person who sent for him, for it was certainly not my father. You will find him arrived when you return, Master Peter, never fear."

And she danced away into the sunny pleasaunce in chase of her little dog, who had escaped from her arms.

"I pray you," said the Baroness von Krakyow, in a low, tremulous voice, "tell me all you know about Master Reichner. He is—he was—an old friend of mine."

I told her what had befallen, and when I had described the serving-man a shiver passed over her.

"It was the Baron von Krakyow's groom," she said; "there can be only one explanation to this mystery." She leaned her head against the balustrade, and I saw she was struggling to keep calm and unmoved.

"Could you not use your influence with the Baron your husband on his behalf?" I ventured to suggest.

"My influence!" she laughed bitterly. "Nay, it will be too late when he returns. The Baron will have given him over to the

priests and their men, and then—there will be no further hope for him."

I was silent; what could I say?

"Listen," she broke out hurriedly, drawing me out into the pleasaunce, through the open doorway, "I must tell you more, since I have said so much. I know you are his friend—he told me so—therefore I can trust you. We—we were betrothed from childhood, and we loved each other. Then he joined the Hussite Church, and my father forbade him ever to see me again. I was wed to the Baron von Krakyow—he is my husband—I must not say aught against him. I had only seen Max once since we parted, and then the other day—oh, I could not help it, I found the old love was not dead, though I have tried, struggled to subdue it. He told me as we walked together that we must never allow ourselves to speak of love, that it would be a sin for us both, and that I must try to forget him. Forget him! He is nobler, truer than ever, and I fear—I fear he has not forgotten me. Ah! why do I tell you all this? You must not repeat it to any living soul, for no one would understand. Indeed I

have striven to be a true and loyal wife to the Baron von Krakyow, and this is my reward. He has treacherously, cruelly—nay, I will not speak against him—God knows, and He will recompense." She paused, restraining the long pent-up anger and sorrow which were struggling to find vent in words. Her face changed, she was once more the quiet, gentle lady I had pictured her. "Forgive me," she said, "I ought not to have burdened a boy like you with my troubles. Do not tell Max; I want him not to be troubled about me; I want him not to think of me more than can be helped. Ah, but I forgot—I forgot! Perhaps you will never see him any more."

"Dear lady," I said, feeling my own voice break, "we must hope for the best. He is young and strong and brave—perchance he may escape. And—if I may say so—I do not think he will forget you, but rather think of you as his guardian angel, praying for him, and loving him still—only differently."

She bowed her head, and I saw that tears had come to her relief.

"Thank you," she said very low, "thank

you; I will, I can, pray for him. I, too, am of his faith, though I dare not confess it yet. Farewell, and God be with you."

I kissed her hand in silence, and then turned back to the castle, and, passing through the great gateway, made my way down the hill towards the village.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE.

TWO days passed away without any news of Master Reichner. They seemed more like two weeks—so long, so dreary, so full of anxiety were they. I did my work as usual all day, and in the evening we gathered for reading and prayer in Hans Welden's kitchen, and I found some comfort in obeying his last wish and reading aloud from his Bible. The village people, at least those who belonged to our faith, were full of sympathy and anxiety too, for the young pastor had made them all love him by his courteous ways and his earnest words. The older men held out no hope of our ever seeing him again. We might hear of his death, they said, but even that was doubtful.

I could not help hoping somewhat from

the favour of the Lord of Külmwald; but Hans Welden reminded me how dangerous a thing it would be for the Baron if it were known that he had received and protected a heretic.

"And," he added, "though my lord is a good man and kindly, he would not risk anything for the sake of the pastor. It cost him nothing to invite him once to the castle, but if he were to make inquiries and espouse his cause, the Baron might himself get into trouble."

This was true enough, but it seemed the only chance which remained, and I hoped on, though every hour made good tidings more improbable. On the evening of the second day I heard the sound of horses, and, looking to see who was coming, I saw none other than the Baron von Krakyow with his servitors riding through the village. I longed to rush out and catch his bridle, and demand that he would tell me where he had taken my friend, but I had the sense to refrain. I had to watch him ride past, with a look of triumph on his evil

countenance, as of one who has planned and carried out some cruel enterprise. My first thought was of Master Reichner; my second — ah, woe to the wife of such a man as that Baron! Others besides myself saw him pass, and fists were shaken after him, and one solemn curse was uttered; but we were powerless, we could do nothing— nothing!

The next day I was bidden to take one of Frau Rendl's chairs which was broken to be mended by Hans Welden, and as I was carrying it through the village I saw two figures, followed by a third, coming down the straggling street. As they came nearer I saw that they were the Baroness von Krakyow and the Lady Gertrude, with an attendant, taking a walk for the sake, doubtless, of fresh air and exercise. Now, to my shame be it spoken, when I saw them appear I felt my cheeks growing hot, and I wished Mistress Rendl's chair anywhere in the world but in my hands. However, I had to put a bold face on the matter, so as they came up I doffed my cap, and

made no attempt to conceal what I was doing.

"Good-day, Master Peter. What, moving house single-handed!" laughed the little lady.

"I work for wages," I replied, smiling, "and this is part of my work, Lady Gertrude. See, this chair lacks a leg!"

"And will you mend it? Are you a carpenter?"

"Nay, I am but the bearer. My friend, Master Welden, will mend it. It is with him I am living."

A little haughty toss of the head was the only answer I got. It was evidently a shock to the little patrician to find that I was but a common working lad, though indeed I had never posed as anything else.

"I think work is noble," said the Baroness von Krakyow; "there is nothing base or low in honest labour. Why, Gertrude, was not our Lord Himself a carpenter?"

Somewhat abashed by this reproof, the little lady made no reply, and the Baroness went on to me:

"Will you put down your chair a minute,

and show us the way to the old water-mill? I should like much to see it."

"I know the way quite well," cried the Lady Gertrude; "there is no need for this noble squire to come with us."

But nevertheless I went, after leaving my chair with Master Welden, guessing that the Baroness wanted to speak with me. The chance came when the lively Lady Gertrude went off with her attendant to explore the mill, and I was left standing alone, by the mill-stream, with the Baroness von Krakyow.

"Have you heard aught of Master Reichner?" she began at once.

I could only shake my head sadly, and say that we had no news of him whatever.

"My husband returned yester even," she said in a low voice; "the Baron von Külmwald asked him at supper, half jestingly, what he had done with the heretic pastor, but he denied any knowledge of him. I ventured to ask him myself, but—I learned nothing. He was very angry with me for asking him."

"Therefore we know nothing more," I said despondingly.

"I am as certain as I can be that the Baron knows," said the young wife sadly; "but he never tells me anything. We shall never know any more—never."

"Be not so cast down," I said, trying to speak cheerfully; "we may hear more soon; he will send word if he is alive."

She shook her head, and at that moment the merry voice of her companion was heard, and we were joined by the Lady Gertrude.

"Ah, it is such a charming place!" she cried. "Why do you look so sad and gloomy? You hardly ever laugh now, dear Eva."

"It is a beautiful place," said the Baroness, smiling rather sadly; "but we must turn back towards the castle, Gertrude, if we do not want to be late for vespers."

"Oh, to be sure! Father Ulrich is so severe, and especially on you, I think, though you *are* our guest. Only think, Master Peter, he made the Baroness kneel for three hours on the chapel floor last night! Was he not

cruel? One would think, Eva, that you were a heretic."

"Come, Gertrude, you must not talk so much. Farewell, my friend," she added, turning to me.

"Farewell, Master Workman! What a pity you are obliged to toil for your living! You would make such a good squire!"

And with this the Lady Gertrude tripped after her friend, and I returned as quickly as I could to my work, having lost nearly half an hour.

That night, when the labour of the day was over, I went forth for a long ramble alone in the forest, to try and rid myself of the sad forebodings and fears which filled my mind. Was Master Reichner indeed dead? My best, almost my only friend! I could not and would not think calmly of this probability, and my heart beat fast, and the blood rushed to my brain, as it came over me that, in all likelihood, the sight of him riding away in the twilight had been the last I should ever have. Was I to do nothing? Was I calmly to give him up for lost, without making a single effort

on his behalf? If I had but the slightest idea of what had befallen him, the position would not be so hopeless; but I had none, absolutely none. A vision of his active, upright figure, his handsome face—nay, handsome is not the word; it was the face I loved best in the world, with the exception of Wilma's—his unfailing goodness and cheerfulness, his unselfishness, his courage, rose up before me, and filled me with grief unspeakable. I wandered up and down under the pine trees, trying to pray, but finding no words, and feeling hard and cold and resentful against God Himself. That was a miserable night, for, besides my anxiety for him, I had the uncertainty as to my own future weighing heavily on me. True, I had agreed to share his dangers and hardships; but I had not thought of this hopeless waiting, this growing dread as to his fate; I would gladly have taken part with him in suffering, but this was infinitely worse.

I returned to the house after all the others were abed, but found that good Master Welden had left the door open for me. I was so preoccupied that I walked straight in, forgetting

to shut the door after me, and went up to the attic chamber where I slept. There was a moon that night, which came in at the little window and showed me, to my surprise, a scrap of parchment lying on my bed. I took it up and held it close to the window, where by the aid of the moonlight I managed to decipher the following words:

"Father Ulrich suspects you of heresy, and, I know, means to have you taken to-morrow. Be warned, and escape, for the sake of M. R. I send this by one I can trust. We leave this place to-morrow. E. von K."

Here was a fresh complication. I was truly grateful to the fair young Baroness for her warning, sent no doubt at grave risk to herself; but I was very loath to leave the only place where I had a chance of hearing somewhat of my friend. Moreover, where could I go? Not back to Kolin, where I knew I should be at once taken and imprisoned. To Prague? Nay, the persecution there was worse than anywhere else, and besides, I knew no one in that city. I must therefore wander forth into the unknown, and try to find some

quiet village where I could get work, and read the Bible to those who would listen. It was a desolate prospect at the best, and my heart failed me as I thought it over. However, I had not much time to waste—I must get a little rest, and then start forth before break of day; so, without undressing, I flung myself down on my narrow bed and tried to sleep. Sleep never comes when it is too eagerly sought after, and my brain was so full of thoughts and plans that I could get no real rest, though at last I fell into a disturbed and broken slumber, full of evil dreams and anxious forebodings.

Suddenly I was broad awake, with the distinct feeling that someone or something was in the room close to me, though, the moon being just then behind a cloud, I could see no one. I sat up on my bed and stared into the darkness, but there was no sound. "It is a nervous fancy," I thought, and I lay down once more and shut my eyes. When I next opened them the moon shone full into the room, and there, between me and the window, stood the figure of a man.

I started up and stood facing him, ready to struggle for my liberty if need be. I was unarmed but strong, and I would not be taken tamely. The man made a step forward and seized my hand, at the same time raising his other to enjoin silence. Then I knew him—it was Master Reichner.

If I had not been well-nigh a man I should have sobbed for joy; as it was I clasped his hand and looked long into his face, almost too much surprised and delighted to speak.

"Well, dear boy," he said at last in a low voice, "you are glad to get me back? How have you fared since I left you?"

"I have missed you sorely," I said; "but how did you escape? Did not the Baron von Krakyow take you after all?"

"I will tell you all in time," he answered; "but now we must be gone. This place is no longer safe for us. I will wake Hans Welden and bid him farewell."

"First read this," I said, giving him the scrap of parchment I had received that evening.

"Did *she* send you this?" he asked, his

face lighting up. "She thought of us, then, and warned you herself. It is another reason for departure."

And he went away to see the good carpenter, while I gathered up the few small possessions I had with me, and took my friend's Bible from its hiding-place. In a few minutes we were stealing, two ghostly figures, I doubt not, out of the village and away towards the forest. The moon would set before long, so we made the best use we could of its light while it lasted.

"I have asked Welden to tell all who care to know, that I have escaped from my enemies for the present," said Master Reichner as we went along. "I had not time to tell him all my adventures; the good man took me for a ghost at least, and would scarce believe me to be indeed flesh and blood."

"I wish," I said, "that we could let the Baroness know you are free."

He looked at me questioningly.

"Tell me," he said, "have you seen her since that day?"

And he would have me relate all that had

befallen, and how she looked, and what she said, before he would tell me anything of his own history.

"I would give anything to let her know, since she would like to hear," Master Reichner said hurriedly; "but it would be absolute madness to go to the castle, and I dare not trust any of the village people to go up and tell her, the kind souls would get her into trouble. No; for the present I cannot but leave it, though it is hard to do it. So she told you our story, Hugh; it is not a very thrilling or very terrible one, is it? But it is not easy to have lived through. I must try not to see her again, it is too hard for her; it matters not about myself. Oh, Hugh, you do not know what it is to see her the wife of that man!" he added passionately; "it is easy to forgive wrongs done to one's self, but for her—*her!* To see her thin, pale, sorrowful, trying to crush down her old love, trying to honour her husband—and he such a brute!"

"You had to choose between her and your faith?" I enquired.

"Yes, Hugh. Her father forbade me to think of her, after I became a Hussite."

"How *could* you do it?" I asked in amazement.

"It was the most terrible struggle I ever went through," he said in a low voice. "I have faced death many times, and it is nothing compared with that."

"And has it ever been made up to you?" I asked.

"Yes," he said resolutely; "I think I may truly say it has. There are times when the old trouble and longing come back to me, as they did the other night; but I have never, never really regretted the step I took. If only I knew that she was happy, I could be quite content. *That* is the hardest part of all."

He was silent, and I found myself repeating, half aloud: "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present life, and in the world to come life everlasting."

I had never fully realized that verse before.

He caught the words I was uttering, and said quietly :

"Others have left more than I have. You must not think it so very much, compared with what He left for me. Do you see? That is how I had to look at it."

"Yes ; but He did it for us all—collectively. He did not die for you or me in particular. This is why I find it so hard to understand."

"You are forgetting that God's love is infinite. It was as easy to Him to know us each separately, even before we were born, as it is for me to know you, or you me. That was what made the sufferings of Christ so terrible. He realized the individual sins of us all, and bore them for each separate soul.

"And besides—He was God. He knew that it would only last a little while, and then He would go back to His glory. *We* have to go on blindly, not knowing how long the struggle will last, and not knowing much of what awaits us in Heaven.

"That is where faith must come in. He has promised us strength and help and

gladness in His service here, and He has promised us unutterable joy in heaven. Sometimes it seems dim and far away—that other world; and sometimes it feels so near, as if there were only a thin curtain between us and heaven."

"I hardly ever feel that," I said sadly.

"Perhaps that realization may be part of the blessing He has promised to those who forsake all for Him, and so it will come to you in time. He wants not only our bodies given up to His service, but every thought and wish of our hearts. I think it is only at times when we have consciously given Him all—have made a fresh and entire surrender of our wills to Him, that He gives us those wonderful glimpses, almost into heaven itself."

"I sometimes feel," I said, sighing, "as if it were so terribly hard to be a Christian. One is always struggling, and never getting any further."

Master Reichner smiled.

"My dear boy," he said, "we have to grow in this, just as in our bodily life. You do

not expect a child to shoot up suddenly to man's stature. And as for the fighting—why, what weak Christians we should be if we had no enemies to overcome, or victories to win for God?"

"It seems to me that we have plenty of foes in the world, without having them in our own hearts as well."

"But do you think, because we belong to a persecuted Church, that therefore our hearts are less evil than our neighbours?" he asked.

"Well, no," I admitted; "at least, mine is not. But, surely, when we have given up all for God, and are really trying to follow Him, we ought to find it easy to do right?"

"I fear that is not so. We have to fight foe after foe, doubt after doubt, all our lives through; we cannot expect a bed of roses in this world. Only there is this comfort: every victory we gain makes us stronger for the next fight, and so we do mount up little by little, though we ourselves can scarce perceive it. Why, lad, do you think there has been no change in you since first I knew you? If you do not notice it, I do.

You are firmer, stronger, more faithful than you were three months ago. Take courage, and go forward. We have much to make us glad, even now."

"Yes, indeed," I said; "I have your escape to make me glad, and I feel as if I could never be quite so faithless again, after that."

"Now I will tell you all about it," said my friend; "but take heed how you go here, for there are a great many stumps to trip over."

We were in the depths of the forest by this time, following, as best we could, a narrow pathway made by the charcoal-burners, and as we had to feel our way we could only go slowly, and thus were able to talk to one another.

Master Reichner told me that when he had ridden some way along the road he came to a place where trees grew close together, and where, it being nearly dark, he was obliged to walk his horse. Then suddenly two men sprang out on him, stopped the horse, dragged him to the ground, and struck him violently on the head, rendering him for a minute

unconscious. When he recovered his senses he found that they were tying his arms behind his back, and that a third man was with them, giving them orders. He knew him at once to be the Baron von Krakyow, and, addressing him by name, asked the meaning of this treatment, but received no answer. They made him mount behind one of the men, and then rode off with him to the nearest town, which was called Mirowitz. Here he was delivered up to the authorities as a heretic and a miscreant, and after many abusive words from the Baron he was placed in a cell without light or food.

On the next day he was led out for examination before the magistrates of the town and a number of priests, as his offence was a religious one, and many questions were put to him, which he parried so skilfully that he was remanded. The Baron testified very strongly against him, telling many foul lies against his morality and uprightness, and accusing him of many evil deeds which he had never committed. Doubtless the end would have been death, but a merciful

accident favoured his escape. During the next night, after the Baron had left the place, a fire broke out in the prison, and it was burnt to the ground. After doing all he could to put out the fire, Master Reichner had quietly left the town, unnoticed in the general confusion. He had made his way on foot, with great caution, back to Külmwald, where, as I have related, he found me; and now we were once more free, homeless, and untrammelled, seeking a place for the soles of our feet to rest upon.

I listened to his adventures with great interest, and truly it seemed as if God had heard us even while we were praying for him, and made an accident the means of his escape.

"And where," said I, after we had talked much about this matter, "shall we go next?"

"I think the only safe place for the present will be a cave that I know of, where several others of our faith have taken refuge in times past," said Master Reichner; "it is warm and dry, and within reach of two villages from whence we can obtain food. We must not

live openly in any town or village just at present."

I was much pleased with the idea of dwelling in a cave, and, as my friend told me, laughing, I should have my fill of hardship and adventure. It was several miles from the spot which we had now reached; but the moon had set, and it was too dark to proceed till daybreak, so we sat down on a fallen tree, wrapped our cloaks about us, and made the best cheer we could until the dawn.

CHAPTER IX.

"IN DENS AND CAVES OF THE EARTH."

AS soon as the first streaks of light appeared in the sky we were up, and once more on our way. A few miles brought us to a lonely part of the country, where no one who did not know it well could find his way. It was covered with rocks and bushes, and the ground was broken and uneven, and at times quite craggy.

"Over there," said Master Reichner at last, pointing to a rocky gorge which we were nearing, "is, if I mistake not, the cave we seek."

He was right, and we were soon standing at the mouth of what seemed a small recess running back some six feet into the hillside.

"It is not very large," I remarked.

"This is only the entrance to it," explained

my friend; and he was about to show me what he meant, when on a sudden a man stepped out from a small crevice in the rock and demanded our business. He was a wild, unkempt-looking fellow, with ragged clothes and bare feet, and his face was not an attractive one, though it showed a certain amount of rugged honesty. Master Reichner told him at once who we were, giving his true name with a want of caution at which I was amazed. But, as events proved, he was wise, for the man called to someone invisible to us, and another person appeared from the narrow aperture, dressed more decently, but looking starved and cowed. This man addressed Master Reichner by name, and had evidently seen him before.

"Can we have shelter for a time in the cave?" asked my friend, after greeting him.

"Truly this is a strange place to choose to flee to," said the other, with a dreary smile; "have you not heard that the persecution around here is far more severe than even at Prague and at Kolin? There are ten of us here, all forced to flee from our

homes, and in daily peril of our lives. We dare not venture to Czechtitz or Kralowitz for food, so we are well-nigh starving. You can come and join us if you will, but our fare is as meagre as it can well be, and we have to live like the beasts that perish."

"I would not willingly overcrowd or be a burden to you," said the pastor; "but I think I might be of use in obtaining provisions, and there is no other place where it will be safe to stay at present. I have but just escaped from prison."

"Well, come in," said the man in the same mournful tone; "we will not turn away a needy brother, above all a pastor. Come in and share what we have for ourselves."

He led the way through the narrow opening, which would barely admit the body of a man, into a dark vault, lighted only by a hole far up in the roof, and by a torch which was fastened against the rocky wall. In the dim light we could see two or three women sitting over the embers of a fire, and several men in different parts of the cave.

The air was close, and the people all looked depressed and hungry, their clothes being threadbare and worn, and in some cases actually ragged.

"Brethren," said the man who had admitted us, "here are yet two more unfortunate victims of intolerance and persecution come to take shelter with us. They will add to our cares, but doubtless you will welcome them in the name of the Lord."

The people looked at us with a languid interest. Two of the men recognized the young pastor, and came forward to greet him; but they all seemed so overburdened with care and sorrow, that they could take little interest in us. One old man rocked himself to and fro, muttering:

"The vengeance of the Lord is at hand! He will recompense it on their heads with fire and sword. The wicked shall not go unpunished."

Master Reichner stood up in the cave, looking pitifully at the group around him. Then he said cheerfully:

"Friends, I thank you for your kindness.

I trust we shall be no burden to you, and maybe some fresh faces will serve to cheer your spirits. I am indeed sorely grieved to hear of such bitter persecution in these parts."

"They took both my sons," said one of the women, lifting a haggard face to him; "they were both hanged together, outside my own door, and their bodies burned."

"They tortured my father, and at last hanged him too," said a young man in a voice of bitter despair; "they will do the same to any of us if they catch us."

"See here," said a man stepping forward, and showing his right arm shrunk and powerless, "this is what they did to make me give up my brother. I can never use it again."

I looked from the despairing, heart-sick faces round me to that of my friend, calm, peaceful, yet withal deeply moved by their wrongs. He went from one to another, hearing their story (it relieved them, poor souls, to pour it out to a fresh listener), and he comforted them in his own quiet,

strong way, not underrating their sufferings, but helping them to bear them. The women lifted their bowed heads, the men's faces lost some of their bitterness, and they were willing to listen to what Master Reichner said. Few people could resist him long—his ready sympathy and tact would win the hardest and most revengeful soul; and as he spoke of what God had been to him in the sorest trials, they knew that he, too, had been down into the depths, even as they had.

They gave us a corner in which to sleep (they had curtained off one end of the cave for the women), and we shared their scanty meal, a single rabbit and some coarse black bread, obtained I know not how.

Before we went to rest Master Reichner would have us sing a psalm of praise, and though at first some of the men were sullen, they soon joined in, and we sang "God is our Refuge and Strength," until the vault re-echoed.

Next day Master Reichner took me outside the cave, and as we walked among the bushes

and stones which covered the ground, he said:

"Hugh, we must do our share in provisioning the garrison. Know you how to snare birds and rabbits?"

I was ashamed to have to confess that I knew nothing whatever of such matters, having been born and bred in a town.

"Well then, I will show you, for I have noticed a good many birds of one sort and another, which would be right welcome for our supper. Methinks our good friends in the cave yonder are too dispirited to take much trouble to hunt for food, or they need hardly starve here."

Then in his usual practical way he taught me how to set snares, both for rabbits and for woodcock and snipe, some of which birds he had noticed in the neighbourhood.

"I doubt not there are bears still to be found in these parts," Master Reichner observed as we returned to the cave; "but to organize a bear hunt would be too great a risk, besides which, we have no fit weapons."

"How I wish we could have a bear hunt!" I sighed; "do you indeed think that we should be discovered?"

"I do indeed," he answered; "we must be careful not to stray too far from the cave, for if we were seen, it might compromise our friends as well as ourselves."

"They all seem sorely cast down," I said.

"Yes, and it is little wonder. There is not one of them who has not lost some relation or friend lately, or has not himself been tortured."

As he spoke we came in sight of two of the men, strolling listlessly towards us, their heads hanging down, and a look of the deepest dejection on their faces.

"Well, my friends," said the pastor cheerily, "what a glorious morning this is! Summer seems coming on apace."

A cheerful voice almost startled and shocked the two men, and they looked half-reproachfully at Master Reichner.

"Aye, 'tis fine weather outwardly," said the one with the useless right arm; "but there is nothing save sorrow and suffering for us. It

is the cross which is laid upon us, and we must bear it."

"True, very true. But shall we not enjoy all which God sends to mitigate our lot?"

"This is no time or place for rejoicing or unseasonable mirth," said the other man gloomily; "our homes are burned, our friends are dead. We only are left, and they seek our lives to take them away."

"Yet God hath left Him many thousands in our country who have not bowed the knee to pope or saints," rejoined the pastor; "we are a great body of men, and some day we shall rise once more and gain our freedom of worship. We are not the only Hussites in the land."

"What, shall we fight for our liberty?" cried one of the men.

"The time is hardly ripe yet," said Master Reichner; "but I doubt not the day will come when it will be our duty to rise in a body and demand our rights, even as our fathers did before us. John Huss did not live and die in vain. His work shall never be suffered to die out from among us."

"Never, never!" echoed the others, catching a little of his enthusiasm.

"And meanwhile," continued the pastor, "we must fit ourselves spiritually and bodily for that time, whenever it may come. We must not be half-hearted, down-trodden wretches, but strong, and faithful, and courageous. God is with us, and He will never suffer His truth to die out."

He spoke earnestly and confidently, and then, after a pause, he changed his tone and said cheerfully:

"I trust we shall all sup royally to-night. Werner and I have been setting snares, and we mean to bring in a good supply of meat."

"What, already! When you came hither but yesterday!"

"Aye, certainly. We must have our hands and thoughts employed, if we would keep off evil forebodings and fears. Do you not think so?"

The men agreed, and, looking decidedly less dismal than when we met them, they entered the cave and we followed them.

* * * * *

I must not give in any detail our life at the cave, though it is one of the pleasantest that I cherish. Master Reichner brought a new element into that mournful little band, and hope and cheerfulness sprang up anew. With a young, energetic man among them, they found fresh employments, and spent less time in deploring their fate. Even the old man, whose one comfort had been the thought of vengeance, began before long to join in with his cracked voice when we sang hymns and songs together, and the women grew more contented and resigned, and took more pains in preparing the food and mending the ragged garments of their companions. Of course there were many hardships and discomforts, but I was young and strong, and heeded them not; besides which I was always with Master Reichner, whom I grew daily to love and reverence more and more. He never spoke of his own trouble, and he was the life and soul of us all, ever devising some new occupation, and raising our minds above petty cares and troubles. We remained unmolested for two months, living for the most part on the

birds and animals which we snared, and sometimes on a supply of black bread which one of the men fetched, at some risk, from a house near the village of Czechtitz, whose owner was friendly to us.

I may here mention that Master Reichner taught me many things during these months of quiet and comparative solitude. Though we had only three books between us all, he had much knowledge stored in his brain, and we sometimes demonstrated the problems of Euclid on the sand near the cave, or he would help me with my Greek and Latin, which I was striving not to forget. He taught me a little French too (which afterwards stood me in good stead), and he was at all times a good comrade and friend, as well as a pastor and teacher. We never ventured actually to enter any village, but we sometimes extended our rambles far into the woods and mountains, either searching for game, or merely for the sake of exercise.

On one of these occasions an adventure befell us which might have proved serious, and was the beginning of a fresh series of

troubles. Master Reichner and I, together with Karl Strauss, one of our companions, set forth one day for a long excursion into the mountains. We provided ourselves with a little food, and told our friends that if we were not back before the next day they must not be uneasy as to our safety. We each carried a stout staff, but were otherwise unarmed, save for a knife which Strauss had with him. It was now very warm weather, but we were so high up that there was always a breeze blowing, and thus we did not get too hot.

We were all in high spirits, for, though we were persecuted fugitives, we were young and strong, and it was some time since we had been far from our cave dwelling, which indeed we now felt to be our home. We were among the outlying spurs of the Erz-gebirge, and though none of the peaks attained any great height, they nearly all were capped with the remains of the winter snows, making them grand and beautiful to look upon. We walked through pine forests, until we reached a height at which vegetation ceased, and we were

among rocks and boulders, with only patches of grass here and there. It was very lonely and solemn in this place, but we were too cheerful and light-hearted to feel the solemnity much just then. We spent all that day in climbing and rambling about, and at night we slept in the open air with our cloaks wrapped round us, having grown well accustomed to rough fare.

Next morning we ate what remained of our food, and then Master Reichner suggested that we ought to try to get some game to take back with us, either one of the wild goats or one of the chamois, which we saw in the distance but which were hard to approach. Strauss had often hunted the chamois in former days, but then he had been properly equipped; now he had only his personal strength and skill, his strong staff, and his short hunting knife, which would of course be useless except at very close quarters. However, he said he would try his skill, though he advised us, being ignorant of the art, not to attempt to follow him. We agreed to meet at noon at a certain curiously formed rock, three or four

miles from our sleeping-place, and thence return all together to the cave.

"Would that I had been trained as a chamois-hunter!" I remarked with a sigh, as Strauss walked away with an elastic step and cheerful whistle.

"Poor fellow! Well, it *is* a pity! But since the fates have been so hard on us both, let us find some other occupation till noon. What say you to exploring yonder valley?"

I agreed, and we set off, clambering over rocks and sliding down slippery banks covered with heavy morning dew, till we reached a narrow gorge running up between two steep precipices, on the top of which we could see several chamois against the sky. It was cold and dark in this gorge, for the sun had not risen high enough to shine over the walls which shut it in.

"I'll warrant me there are caves among these rocks," said Master Reichner, springing across a narrow rushing torrent which came tumbling down the bottom of the ravine.

"Yes," I cried; "I see the mouth of one up there. Let us go and examine it."

We found that there was indeed a large cavern, hollowed out (though not by the hand of man) from the steep, rocky wall.

"Why," I exclaimed, "when we are driven from our present home, we can take refuge here. They would never find us in such a lonely place."

"It might do for summer," said Master Reichner, as we stood looking into the dark recess before us, "but it would be damp and cheerless as a dwelling-place in winter, when these mountains are deep in snow."

"Let us examine it," I suggested. "Perhaps it goes back further than we can see."

Accordingly we entered the dark cavern, treading cautiously, for there were pools of water and loose stones, over which we nearly stumbled.

I went first, being eager to explore, and on a sudden my foot struck against something that was not a stone, and on taking it up I found it to be the leg-bone of an animal.

"See!" I said, holding it towards my friend. "I suppose some beast has sought this lonely spot to die. What animal does it belong to?"

Instead of replying, Master Reichner stepped hastily past me, and stood listening.

"What is it?" I asked in surprise.

"I believe we have found our way into a bear's den," he said. "Here are more bones, broken, as if by teeth. Yes, a bear has been here: there are his tracks."

I was much delighted with this announcement, and, going to the further end of the cave, I discovered a half-gnawed piece of meat, which had evidently been recently brought there. When I pointed this out to my friend, he said:

"Hugh, I think we had better not linger here. The bear may soon return, and we are quite unarmed, save for these staves."

But I fear I was somewhat obstinate, and insisted on examining the whole cave, never before having been actually in the den of a bear.

"Here are two horns," I said, stooping to pick up two graceful curved ones, which looked like those of a wild goat. "Could we not take them with us, and make them into flasks?"

Master Reichner examined them carefully, and pronounced them to be a fine pair, and worth keeping. I was about to take them from him, to carry back as my prize, when a sudden exclamation from him made me turn round. The entrance to the cave was darkened by a shadow, or, rather, the very tangible and substantial form of a large bear. On finding its home thus invaded the beast gave vent to a savage growl, and deliberately made for us in a manner which left no doubt as to his intentions regarding us.

"Look out, Hugh!" cried my companion in a tone which startled me. "Don't strike the brute, but get outside as quickly as possible!"

This advice was more easily given than followed, for the entrance to the cave was small, and the bear was large and infuriated by our intrusion. Moreover, he was making straight for me, seeming scarcely to perceive Master Reichner, who was entirely in the shadow. I sprang aside, and tried to pass the animal, as with clumsy movements it reached the end of the cave where I was, but, as ill-luck would have it, my foot slipped on a large

bone, and I fell to the ground. I shall never forget the next moment, when I leapt to my feet, to find myself in the bear's clutches. His shaggy paws crushed me close; his great mouth seemed to yawn before my eyes; his ominous growl sounded close to my ears, and, in a flash, I gave up all for lost. I had never felt death so near me before, and a numbing sensation seized all my faculties, rendering me powerless even to struggle for my life. I could not see Master Reichner, for he was behind me, but I heard a heavy blow crash down on the brute's head, and its deadly grasp relaxed, while it uttered a still more furious snarl of pain and anger. I felt my shoulder seized by a strong hand, and before the bear could renew its fatal clutch, I was torn away and almost thrown forward, out of the cave.

Still dazed by the shock of that terrible embrace, I only half realized that Master Reichner was hurrying me down the steep slope and away from the danger, and that my right arm hung powerless at my side. He did not speak a word until we had crossed the little mountain stream, and mounted some

way on the other rocky slope, far enough to be out of reach of the bear, should it attempt to follow. Then he slackened his pace, released my shoulder, and looked at me anxiously.

"Are you hurt, lad?" he asked; "that *was* a narrow escape for us both!"

My senses had returned, and I drew a deep breath of relief, followed by a groan, as I tried to lift my arm, and failed in the attempt.

"Your arm is broken, I am afraid," said my friend, after examining it; "the beast must have crushed it before he released you."

"How did it happen? Did you strike him?" I asked.

"Yes, with my staff, which fortunately proved stronger than I could have hoped. The blow stunned him, and he relaxed his grasp for a moment. But your arm must be very painful. Let me sling it until we can attend to it properly. It is not safe to linger here longer than is necessary."

Quickly and skilfully he placed my arm in an extempore sling—splints we had none—and then we went forward, for now that my

giddiness was past I could walk along well enough. But by the time we reached the stone where we had agreed to meet Strauss at noon, I was suffering considerably from the jolting and jarring caused by our walk over rocky and broken ground.

The view that stretched before us was magnificent, but we took little heed of it, and I was thankful to sit down and give myself over into Master Reichner's hands. With such poor materials as he had with him he managed to set my arm, and place it between two pieces of wood which we had picked up during the morning. It was a rough piece of chirurgery, but it was the best he could do, and his gentle handling gave me as little pain as was possible under the circumstances. Not long after this business was complete Strauss appeared, with a fine gemsbok across his shoulder, no doubt prepared to triumph good-naturedly over our want of equal success. When he heard of our adventure, however, he was full of interest and sympathy, feeling his own doings quite thrown into the shade by ours. We had a short halt for our

midday meal, and then started to return to the cave, which was about six miles off, over rocky and difficult ground for the most part, making our way seem to be longer than it was in reality.

I was ashamed to let my companions see how weary I was after the first three or four miles, so I plodded on, feeling each moment more sick with pain and fatigue. At last Master Reichner said:

"Hugh, you are ready to drop. Give me your left arm, and lean on me as much as you can."

I gladly accepted his help, for by that time I was too weary to make objections, and all the rest of the way he held me up, half dragging me over rough places, and making me stop every now and then to rest. Never had the cave seemed so homelike in prospect, or so cheerful with its ruddy firelight and frugal supper. I heartily longed to reach its shelter, and lie down in peace in my own corner, covered with an old blanket which one of the kind folk had lent me.

"Hold on a little longer, lad," Master

Reichner said encouragingly; "we have only another mile to go, and then you can rest."

"I never looked forward to our cave as much as I do to-day," I said, putting out fresh efforts.

Strauss, with the buck across his shoulders and his staff in his hand, walked somewhat ahead, but as we neared our destination he dropped back and joined us.

"They shall all sup royally to-night, and to-morrow also," he said cheerfully. "I 'll warrant me the sight of this will do them good."

We passed down the narrow defile, under the rocky hillside, among loose stones and bushes, and we reached the cave's mouth just as the sun's last rays died away in the west.

"How still it all is!" said Master Reichner, pausing before we entered.

Strauss gave a shout to warn our friends that we had returned, and then we all passed into the cave. It was empty, and the fire had gone out. Not a living soul was there, except ourselves, and every trace of bedding or cooking utensils had disappeared. I sank

down on the bare floor, too weary to pay much heed to these strange circumstances; but my companions looked at each other in some alarm.

"The place has been discovered," said Master Reichner; "they have all been forced to flee."

CHAPTER X.

VENTURING INTO THE LION'S DEN.

"THIS is a most unfortunate thing," Master Reichner said, looking at me; "I scarce know what we can do, since they have left no message to tell us the nature of the danger."

"They would not all have quitted the place so suddenly," said Strauss, "unless there had been urgent need."

This was self-evident, and with reluctance in his voice Master Reichner told me his decision.

"Hugh, I am sorely vexed to turn you out once more, so weary as you are; but I fear it would be madness to spend the night here."

"As you will," I said mechanically, rising from the ground where I had seated myself.

"Nay, lad, rest a few minutes longer while

we thoroughly search the cave and try to find some food. You see," he added to Strauss, "we know naught of where the danger lies, so we may rush blindly into our enemies' arms."

They both searched the place thoroughly, but found nothing save a few bones and some cooked roots, with which we were fain to be content for our supper. After half an hour's rest I felt refreshed, and able to start forth once more into the world to seek another shelter. It was pitch dark when we arose and left the cave, Strauss still bearing the gemsbok, and Master Reichner walking beside me to aid me over rough places if need were. Our few worldly belongings had vanished with our friends, doubtless for safety's sake. We had proceeded but a few paces, when from out the shadows of the hillside a man's figure suddenly appeared, and a voice said:

"Stay—it is the pastor, is it not?"

Master Reichner recognized the voice before I did, and answered boldly:

"Yes, it is I."

The man came close to us, and I found that

he was one of our friends who had doubtless stayed near the cave in order to speak with us on our return.

"Tarry not so near the hiding-place," he said hurriedly; "we had sure notice this morning that we should be surprised and arrested to-night. Little Karl Schneider from the village came up to warn us, so we judged it best to separate and seek shelter elsewhere."

"They have all gone in different directions, I suppose," said Master Reichner; "have you any knowledge of whence the danger comes? Have you heard whether Würzli is safe?"

"It is perilously near," said the man.

"I know it, but Werner here has had an accident, and we have already come a long distance since noon. He is well-nigh at the end of his powers."

"Nay," I said; "think not of me. I can push on some miles. I am no girl."

"I should not counsel you to go to Würzli," said the other; "it is strongly Papist, and the people are unfriendly to us. Better sleep in the open air, master."

"Yes," assented Master Reichner; "after all, that will be safest and best. Shall you stay with us, or walk on till you find a shelter?"

"The night is so dark that one needs to know every inch of the ground to walk securely. I think I shall remain with you till morning, if you do not object."

Master Reichner assured him that he would be delighted, and thanked the good fellow heartily for staying in the dangerous vicinity to give us warning. We all went on for about a mile, striking out across a bare expanse of rocky country, where there were few trees and no dwellings, till at length our leader called a halt close to a mound of earth, on which grew some thick bushes.

"If we lie among these bushes," he said, "we shall be sheltered from the weather, and we can sleep safely. We must not think of having a fire, I fear."

The night was chilly, but we were warmly clad and used to hardship, so we laid ourselves down under the stars, and in spite of weariness and some pain from my arm, I

soon fell asleep. In the morning, when I awoke, I found myself wrapped in Master Reichner's cloak, which he had thrown over me as soon as slumber had come to prevent my refusing to accept it. He would not let me thank him, and said that he had not wanted it himself, and that my injured arm needed a little extra warmth to prevent a dangerous chill. In truth he watched over me, as he had promised my mother that he would do, like a brother.

Early in the morning we bade farewell to our two companions, agreeing that we had better not keep any longer in so large a number as four, and they gave us many "God speed you's!" and hearty good wishes before they strode away.

Master Reichner and I also made all haste to go upon our journey, with a few regrets after the plump gemsbok, which, had circumstances permitted, would have made us such a royal feast for our breakfast. As it was we set forth fasting, anxious to put as great a distance as possible between ourselves and the cave. We purposed to go to a friendly

little town named Kuttenberg, not far from Kolin, where we hoped to find shelter for a time, unless the persecution had increased there as elsewhere. Truly, our country was in a dreary state when men were forced to flee from place to place for their lives, merely because they asked for liberty to worship God as they thought right!

Of that day's wanderings I need say naught here, for no special misadventure befell us, and we encountered no enemies save hunger and fatigue. Towards nightfall we reached Kuttenberg, and went to the house of a woman whom Master Reichner knew to be kind-hearted and charitable, if not actually one of us. Her hearty welcome did us both good, and the plentiful supper which she gave us revived both our bodies and spirits. While we were eating it she talked of the weather, the marriage of the king, a recent fire in the town, and other facts of which we, from our long seclusion, were wholly ignorant.

That night was the first for many weeks that I had spent in a bed, and though it was hard and the blankets thin, I have seldom

felt so luxuriously comfortable in my life. Next morning I felt the effects of the past two days' exertions and privations, for my arm had become inflamed, and I was all in a fever. Though sorely provoked with myself for what I considered unmanly weakness, I found that the only remedy was rest, and Master Reichner insisted on my staying in bed.

"Now that there is a bed for you to stay in," he said, smiling, "you had better make the most of it, Hugh."

Good Frau Bernt, our hostess, was kindness itself, caring for me as if I had been her own son, and asking no inconvenient questions. Master Reichner was out most of the day, visiting some acquaintances, and ascertaining, as far as he could, the state of feeling in the town as regarded the Catholics and the Hussites. He found that at present no very stringent measures had been taken against those of our faith, but he heard that at Kolin the persecution raged as fiercely as ever. It was wonderful that there were any Hussites left, so persistently were they harassed; but

it seemed as though more sprang up to fill the places of those who were taken, and so our Church grew instead of diminishing.

This news from Kolin made me very uneasy about Wilma, for I feared that Master Müller would not be much longer able to shelter her; and, indeed, I wondered that we had not heard long ago of his arrest. Master Reichner, to whom I spoke of this matter, told me that he had seen a man from Kolin that day in the town, who had given him the names of the heretics lately arrested, and that the name of Johann Müller was not among them. Still, he agreed with me that my fears were not without foundation, and he promised me to be on the watch for any further news from Kolin. Next day my arm was no better, and it was thought well that I should see a chirurgeon, so Frau Bernt fetched a hard-faced, strong-limbed man, who handled me in a rough-and-ready manner which tried my fortitude considerably. The arm, he said, was not setting well, owing to the want of proper splints, and so it had to be wrenched apart

and reset, a process which left me somewhat exhausted and suffering.

I was lying on my bed towards evening, feeling low-spirited and shaken, when I heard Master Reichner's step outside my door. He had not been in the house at the time of the surgeon's visit, and, though I had missed him a good deal, I had been glad he was not there, for the chirurgeon had seemed curious, and asked many questions. At length, however, he had come, and my spirits revived directly he entered my little chamber. He had heard, I doubt not, a harrowing description of my late interview with the surgeon from good Frau Bernt, for his face was full of concern, and he began to blame his own clumsy handling as the cause of my troubles.

"You must forgive me," he said. "I did what I could, but I know that it was badly done. I am *so* sorry for you, Hugh."

I was a little surprised at his speaking thus, for, as a rule, we took it for granted that we could both bear a few hard knocks without expecting much pity in words. We

deemed that sympathy is shown quite as well by deeds as by fair speeches, and therefore I wondered why he should look at me and speak thus.

"It is nothing at all," I said. "The chirurgeon says it will get right very quickly now. Do not trouble about me."

Master Reichner had seated himself on the edge of my pallet, and I noticed that he was holding a scrap of paper in his hand.

"It is not only your broken arm that troubles me," he said after a moment, "but I have had some more news from Kolin—news which affects you more than me."

"From Wilma?—from the Müllers?" I cried.

For answer he gave me the little paper into my hand, and, hastily unfolding it, I read the following words, which were written in my sister's small neat characters:—

"I have heard that you are near, and one hath promised to bear this to you. Master Müller has been in prison for two months, and now Mistress Müller is turned out of her house, and I am to go to the convent.

Oh, Hugh! come if you can. I have no friends who can take me in, and I should die in that terrible convent. I *must* see you again; it is so long since you went away.—WILMA."

It had evidently been written in haste, before the poor child had stopped to think whether there were any place for me to take her. I could not help exclaiming bitterly as I gave the note to my friend:

"They leave *no one* in peace—not even a young, innocent girl like Wilma!"

Master Reichner read the message through, and looked at me to see what I thought of it.

"What is to be done?" I cried impatiently. "I *must* go to her; they shall never force her into the convent while I can prevent it."

"Poor child! She dreads the thought of it, but possibly it would be the best thing for her for the present."

"Master Reichner!" I exclaimed indignantly, "how can *you* say such a thing? Do you think I would let her be taken and made a Papist of against her will?"

"Don't blame me too hastily, Hugh. You do not know what a state Kolin is in. I doubt if there is a single family of our faith who could take her in. In the convent she would be cared for and educated, and they would not expect a child of thirteen to take the veil."

"But once there, would she ever be allowed to slip through their hands?"

"There's the danger. And she would need a wonderful amount of strength of character to keep her faith against all the temptations they would hold out. You are right; I was looking at the question merely from a temporal point of view. She must not go to the convent if we can help it."

"I will go to-night," I said, jumping up, forgetful for the moment of my crippled state. Master Reichner put me back on the bed with his strong hand as if I had been a babe.

"My dear boy, your strength is not up to your spirit," he said kindly. "You must not even think of going downstairs."

"But meanwhile Wilma will be taken—she

will think I care nothing for her," I urged, getting hot and excited. "Think whether a broken arm would keep you from *your* sister if she needed you?"

"Hugh, you must trust me instead. I am going into Kolin to-night, and I will bring her away if it is possible."

"*You* are going—not because of us? You will not go right into the worst place you could choose?" I cried.

"I was thinking of going there, in any case, to look round," he asserted, with that touch of recklessness which was part of his nature; "so, you see, it will be quite a reason for my going. Have you any message you want to send to your sister?"

"But are you really going?" I asked, somewhat reassured by his cheerful words, "and shall you bring Wilma to this house? I can't tell you how grateful I am, but I wish I could go myself."

"I am not afraid of a little risk; it makes a thing more worth doing. Yes, I shall start in an hour's time, and you may expect to see Mistress Wilma to-morrow, if all goes well."

"You will bring her yourself?" I asked.

"I hope so," he said more gravely; and afterwards those words haunted me with vague fears.

We talked for a time, and he had some food to fortify him for his long walk. Then, as the sun was setting, he told me that he should set off, and he gave me many injunctions to take care of myself during his absence.

"I hardly know whether I can trust you not to do anything foolish," he said, standing by my bedside, the picture of young, vigorous manhood, his cloak flung round him and his stick in his hand.

I promised to keep quiet, so as to be quite well when he and Wilma came back on the morrow; and once again I thanked him, and sent messages to my little sister.

"Farewell, then, till to-morrow," he said cheerfully as he left me; and I, too, echoed his words: "Farewell—till to-morrow!"

Ah, it was not on the morrow that I saw him again, and how different it all was from my hopes and expectations!

It is well, perhaps, that the future is hidden from us, and yet, had I only known what would befall my friend in Kolin, I think I would even have given up Wilma, rather than let him go. But I foresaw nothing—deceived by his hopeful words; and so he went forth, and I slept peacefully until the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHIRURGEON'S TIDINGS.

IT is strange how accustomed one can get to an atmosphere of danger and anxiety—it seems incredible to me, looking back, that I could have slept so soundly and dreamlessly that night, and have awaked in the morning untroubled by any fears or forebodings. Those days of anxiety at Külmwald had ended so well, and Master Reichner seemed to have such a faculty for escaping from dangerous situations, that it scarcely occurred to me to consider his venturing into Kolin as anything extraordinary.

Of course there was a risk, but our whole life of late had been made up of risks, so why should not this last adventure end as well as all the rest? My arm was less

painful, my spirits had risen at the prospect of seeing Wilma so soon, and Frau Bernt told me cheerfully that I looked a different creature from the pale and weary wanderer who had stumbled into her hospitable kitchen three days before.

I told her about Wilma, and the good soul promised her a hearty welcome when she should come. She had no children of her own, and all young people had a charm for her, so I did not doubt that my sweet-faced little sister would quickly win her heart. With my injured arm in a sling I came down into her parlour, and we had plenty of talk as she stitched at her needlework or went about her household tasks.

The morning passed quickly, and, as the afternoon wore on, I began to have the pleasant expectant feeling which we all know so well. Perhaps in an hour they would have come. Frau Bernt told me that anyone coming from Kolin could not take more than two hours over the walk, and I saw no reason why they should delay their start.

"The fräulein shall sleep in the little closet which opens out of mine," said Frau Bernt cheerily; "she shall go early to rest, for she will be weary with her walk, and you, too, must take care of yourself. I have some very savoury stew for supper, my friend, and some cakes, as a little extra treat!"

And she nodded and smiled, and bustled off into the kitchen to see to the cooking of these same delicacies.

The sun sank lower and lower, and twilight set in. The little narrow street, upon which the parlour window looked, became gray and misty, and lights began to twinkle in the opposite house. A few labourers came home from work—I could see them go up the steps of their own houses and enter the lighted rooms within.

It grew dark at last, but still I was not uneasy, for I thought Master Reichner might have deemed it prudent to lie in hiding all day and start at dusk. Frau Bernt brought in a small oil-lamp, and came to the window to close the shutter; but I begged her to leave it open a little longer,

so that I might see them coming up the street.

"It is time for supper," she said, "but we will wait half an hour longer for them. The poor child! she will be cold and weary. I wonder why they started so late."

I did not answer, for at last my fears were aroused. I thought of my friend's words, "I hope so," uttered so gravely, when I had asked if he would bring Wilma himself; and almost for the first time a dozen possible dangers occurred to me, filling my mind with a strange foreboding, the like of which I had never felt before. "You do not know what a state Kolin is in," he had said, and at the time I had scarcely heeded his words. Now I reproached myself bitterly for letting him go there instead of me; and as time went by, and still they did not come, my anxiety grew almost unbearable.

"They cannot be coming to-night," said Frau Bernt at last, breaking the silence; "we must have supper without them."

I turned from the window, and I suppose

she read some of my thoughts in my face, for she said kindly:

"You are getting uneasy about them. Never fear—they will come to-morrow. You are tired of straining your eyes through the darkness. Come and eat, and you will be hopeful again."

I swallowed my supper mechanically, and tried to hide my fears, for I did not know quite how far I might safely trust my good hostess. But women are quick to understand, and she startled me by saying:

"Perhaps your friend has taken shelter with some of his own people. To-day is a feast-day, and all Kolin would be turned out into the streets to rejoice. I heard, moreover, that several heretics were to make a public recantation of their errors. Your friend would perhaps not wish to be recognized."

She looked at me meaningly, and I replied that it was true he had enemies in the town, whom he would fain avoid meeting.

"You need say no more. The fewer words one utters in these times the better. You have finished supper? Go to bed, then, and

sleep soundly, for you will hear nothing more to-night."

I went upstairs, but I got little sleep that night. Whenever I turned over I seemed to see Master Reichner's well-knit figure standing at the door, and hear him say, "Farewell — till to-morrow." Whenever I slept I dreamed ghastly dreams, and the market-place at Kolin rose up before me, with crowds of people, and priests, and the form of a prisoner, whose face I could never catch sight of.

I was glad when morning came at length, and I could go downstairs. I had not taken my clothes off all night, partly because of my arm, and partly because I wished to be ready for any emergency. Frau Bernt was cheerful and encouraging, though I believe she knew my fears to be well grounded.

Soon after breakfast a heavy knocking at the door made me start up eagerly; but it proved to be the chirurgeon, who had called to see how my arm was doing. He seemed fairly satisfied with its progress, and made

some rough jokes about bear-hunting and its results.

"There has been no bear-baiting at Kolin for months," he said, "for the priests provide a more amusing entertainment nowadays, when they burn heretics in the market-place. They do not torture them in public—oh, no! that is reserved for their private gratification. By the way, Frau Bernt, have you heard that they have caught that heretic rascal, Max Reichner, at last? He was one of the most dangerous of them, and the priests hate him heartily. They took him yesterday in the market-place, where several of his sect were to make their recantation. He was skulking about in the crowd, and he tried to speak to one of the fellows and persuade him to 'stand firm,' or some such foolery. Father Kanitz recognized him, and now he is in the prison, awaiting his trial. There will be another burning soon."

"Did the other heretic still recant?" asked Frau Bernt.

"No—the fool! When he saw the pastor and heard his words, he said he dared not,

for very shame. He was taken back to prison with Reichner, I believe."

"And is the pastor sure to meet his death?" inquired Frau Bernt.

"Yes, certain. He is well known all over the country, and the priests have been trying for a long time to get hold of him. No fear that he will get off, unless his master, the devil, interferes on his behalf," he added, with a rough laugh. "Well, young man, your arm is going on right enough; but don't go after any more bears yet awhile." And he clattered out of the house, humming a drinking song as he went.

I heard it all as if in a dream, and noticed every gesture of his hand and every part of his dress. I suppose my stunned, blank expression struck Frau Bernt, for she looked at me kindly, and said:

"Poor fellow! So he is taken, and you are left! It is a shock for you, I doubt not. Do you think I did not guess that your friend was a heretic pastor? It was rash of him to venture into Kolin just now — such a fine fellow, too!"

I rose and went upstairs, for her talk, though kindly meant, was more than I could bear just then. I sat on my bed and thought. It had come, then. It was all over with my friend, and I could do naught to save him, though it was for my sake and Wilma's that he had gone to Kolin. He was a prisoner, held fast in their clutches, and he would never be free again in this world. I knew it instinctively, as well as if an angel had told me. And here was I, a maimed, useless creature, a fellow-heretic, with no power, no influence, no resources—a rudderless ship, tossing hopelessly alone in the storm. There was nothing, nothing I could do for him, and that was the hardest part of all. But as I sat there, less hopeless thoughts came over me.

I had not lived for those months with Max Reichner without gaining knowledge and strength, and I knew what he would have done in a like moment of distress; so I knelt down then and there, and cried for guidance and for mercy, to that same Father whom *he* felt to be so near him at all times, that

prayer had become the very breathing of his soul.

Even as I prayed I grew calmer, and the fierce storm of sorrow and impotent anger which the surgeon's news had awakened in me was subdued. I was able to sit and think quietly, and for the first time my thoughts turned to Wilma, and I wondered what had happened to her, and whether she had been taken to the convent or not. At all events, one course seemed plain before me—one duty was clearly at hand: I must go to Kolin myself, and without delay. Resolved to take Frau Bernt into my confidence, I went downstairs and made my way into her kitchen, where she was polishing a tin cover, with an unusually grave expression on her cheerful face.

"Frau Bernt," I said, coming to the point at once, "I must go to Kolin without delay. Do not try to prevent me, for I mean to go. Can you help me to alter my looks?"

She poured forth a torrent of expostulation; but I waited until she had exhausted it, and then again asked her if she could aid me in

disguising my appearance. When she saw that I was indeed in earnest, the good woman ceased from her dissuasions, and set herself to help me in my undertaking.

As I am naturally light-complexioned, with fair hair, I resolved to stain my face, and have my hair cut as close to my head as possible, in order to prevent recognition by any of those who would know me well enough if I were to enter Kolin as I was. Frau Bernt clipped my hair as I directed her, and kindly provided me with walnut-juice for my face, which, though tanned by sun and wind, was not dark enough to please me. My hair I also contrived to dye, and when I looked into a little mirror I scarcely could recognize my own countenance, so changed was I! My dress was so travel-worn and old that I did not think anyone would remember it, and, moreover, I believed I had grown to look older and less of a boy since I left my native town some months before.

Thus prepared, I thanked Frau Bernt most warmly for all her goodness, and set forth, with my arm still in its sling, and a stout staff in my

other hand. I had no definite plans in view at present, for I had no idea what it would be best to do, but I was firmly resolved to do whatever was possible to help my friend, and also to see Wilma, if she were not already taken to the convent. My heart was heavy enough as I started on my way, yet I think it was lighter now that I had something definite to do, and was no longer obliged to sit waiting, and imagining endless possibilities. The fresh air, too, told on my spirits, and I began to hope against hope. What though the surgeon *had* said that the pastor's fate was irrevocably sealed. Had not men escaped from worse prisons than the old fortress gaol of Kolin? Were there not many who loved him enough to attempt a rescue even at the last? He had often been in deadly peril before, and why should he not escape again? He was too much needed in the world to be allowed to die. I told myself that God would never permit it, and He would find some means of deliverance for His servant. Thus I reasoned, and persuaded myself that I might hope for the best, even though he were in the hands of

his bitterest enemies. And so, not long after the sun had reached his highest point in the heavens, as I was beginning to feel somewhat weary from my walk, the straggling cottages on the outskirts of Kolin came in sight, and I knew that my difficulties were about to begin.

CHAPTER XII.

OUTSIDE THE PRISON.

IT felt strange to be walking again in the streets of my native town, and I could hardly believe that it was nearly a year since I had seen the spire of the cathedral, and the overhanging gables in the main street. I made my way by some of the narrow pathways which I knew very well towards the house of Herr Müller, for I was determined to seek out Wilma first, if she were still there. On my way I passed my old home, for though I might have avoided it, I could not refrain from seeing it again from the opposite side of the street. It was inhabited, for there was smoke curling from the chimneys, and the windows were open; moreover some children were standing in the doorway playing with a dog, a little mongrel which I remembered

very well. I was glad it should be dwelt in—the dear old home—it would have been worse to see it empty and deserted. I passed along the street without stopping, and turning into the square near by I soon stood at the door of the house where Herr Müller had dwelt. There were few people about, and no one had bestowed more than a glance on me, so I had not felt much fear of recognition at present. I knocked at the door, and when it was opened I inquired if Mistress Müller still dwelt within. The maidservant shook her head in a vacant way, and said that there was no such person in the house; but after much questioning I found that Mistress Müller had gone to dwell in a small back street not far from the cathedral. I made my way there forthwith, and by dint of many cautious inquiries I found which house she lived in. She had hired one room, they said, and was living in great poverty, and alone. I found her in a small back chamber, looking ill and sorrowful; but when she found who I was, she seemed glad to see me, and took my hand warmly.

"I know wherefore you have come," she said, pointing me to a seat; "I wish I could give you good news of poor Wilma."

"Where is she?" I asked eagerly; "have they already taken her to the convent?"

"Yes, the sisters came for her yesterday afternoon," Mistress Müller answered sadly; "the poor child begged to be allowed to stay with me, and entreated them with tears, but in vain. They spoke kindly enough to her, but they would have her go with them, and they said they had authority from the priests to take her."

"Then she is now in the convent?"

"Yes, I suppose so; I felt as if I were parting from a child of my own."

"How can I thank you enough, Mistress Müller," I said, "for all your goodness to her? What would she have done all these months but for you?"

"I would gladly have kept her with me, while I had a crust of bread between us," she replied; "but you have doubtless heard about my dear husband's imprisonment?"

She seemed glad to pour out all her troubles

and fears, so I would not interrupt her, though I was longing to ask her whether she knew anything about Master Reichner.

Herr Müller had been more than two months in prison, she told me, and he was to be brought again before the judge in a week's time.

"There will be a large trial of prisoners," said she, "and among them your friend, Pastor Reichner. We thought, Wilma and I, that you and he had been together all this while."

I explained how we had been separated, and asked whether he had been able to see her or Wilma before his arrest.

"No, we saw nothing of him," she said; "the first we heard was that he had been arrested in the market-place, when that poor young Kopf was to make his recantation. Wilma feared much for your safety, for she knew that you must be near, and she thought you might be with him in Kolin."

"I would that I had been here instead of him," I answered. "If it had not been for this arm of mine, I should never have allowed

him to run so great a risk for our sakes. And now it seems all to no purpose, for he did not even see Wilma!"

"Truly, it is hard to see why it was allowed to happen," Mistress Müller said, sighing; "his is such a precious life, and he can so ill be spared."

"But something must and shall be done!" I cried vehemently; "it is not hopeless yet. I suppose he is in the prison with the rest, or have they sent him to Prague?"

"He is in the prison here," answered Mistress Müller; "I went yester eve to see my husband, and I heard that Master Reichner was in a cell by himself, awaiting his trial."

"Would there be any chance of seeing him?" I asked.

"I should not think so; and besides — you would run such risk of being taken yourself."

"Risk! what do I care?" I said impatiently. "He ran far more risk many a time for me. I mean to see him somehow, come what may."

Mistress Müller reminded me that I might be able to see him at his trial, if it were a public one. "But they speak of a secret trial for him," she added, under her breath; "he *may* not appear with my husband and the others, after all."

"Well, I shall contrive it somehow," I said. "Tell me, Mistress Müller, am I well disguised? Would you have known me if I had not told you who I was?"

"No, I think not," she replied, studying me critically; "your hair and face are entirely altered. I believe it would be safe for you to venture anywhere in the town, if you are only careful in your speech. What do you propose to do? I suppose there is nothing to be done for our poor little Wilma?"

"I fear not, at present. I mean to try to get together a band of men belonging to our faith who will be willing to arm, and rescue Master Reichner." I spoke confidently, for this idea had been forming in my mind for some little while, and I knew that there were many who had been waiting for some

time in the hope of a pretext for a rising on behalf of our liberty.

Mistress Müller was startled and surprised at such an idea, for she had never thought of a physical resistance being made.

"Are we not told to suffer patiently, and not to fight them with carnal weapons?" she said timidly.

"Yes; but when one's best friend is in danger of death, it cannot be wrong to do one's utmost to save him," I affirmed. "If there be no other way but force, I believe there are many who will help me to use it. Why should we Protestants be ground down and persecuted, without making any attempt to gain our freedom? God helps those who help themselves, and Master Reichner even used to say that the time might come again to fight for our faith as our fathers did."

"Well, I hope you will be guided aright," sighed Mistress Müller, "and if there is anything I can do to help you, you must come to me. And, Hugh, you will not forget your sister in your anxiety for your friend?"

"No, no!" I said; "but at present I cannot see what I could do for her, and time presses, if I am to persuade all these men to help me in my enterprise."

I bade her farewell, and went down into the street, filled with energy, and confident in the success of my undertaking. I knew that there were not many of our friends left in Kolin itself, but in some of the villages round there were not a few who were still unmolested, and others who were secretly of our faith, and would be willing to help. I walked round by the prison and looked up at its grim, gray walls, wondering where my friend was confined, and what he was doing and thinking. Was he kept with great strictness, I wondered, and did they allow him any of the comforts with which we had been able to supply my father?

As I paused under the shadow of the opposite houses I noticed a young man who was also loitering near with an aimless air. He looked like a superior peasant, and I felt as though I had seen his face before. On reflection I recalled to mind the meeting

in a barn, which I had unintentionally surprised in the winter, and, if I remembered aright, this man was the very one who had spoken so roughly to me on my entrance. My spirits rose at the thought. He was one of us, and Master Reichner trusted him, I was sure. Could I not accost him, and find out whether he would join me in my enterprise? I sauntered carelessly towards him, and contrived to jostle against him in such a manner that it was needful to offer an apology for my rudeness.

"Pardon me," I said, "but I was so engrossed in thinking of certain prisoners in yonder building, that I did not heed my steps."

The young man looked at me sharply, and asked:

"You have friends in there, then?"

"Yes," I answered in a lower tone, "and, if I mistake not, there is one in the prison whom we both know. Did I not see you once in a certain barn out in the woods?" He stared at me with much suspicion, and did not reply, so I went on, being careful that no one was in

hearing, "Is not your name Meyer? I am Hugh Werner, and I am searching for Master Reichner the pastor."

This was a bold venture, but it had the desired effect, for the young man instantly grasped my hand, and his suspicions of me vanished.

"Come away from here," he said; "we can speak more freely elsewhere. I know a small tavern where we shall be safe from prying eyes."

He led me by a narrow passage between two rows of overhanging dwellings to a small inn, standing in a quiet and unfrequented part of the town. Here my companion called for some refreshment, and we settled ourselves in a dark corner of the inn parlour, which we found entirely empty.

"You have changed a good deal since I saw you at that meeting," began my new friend, eyeing me curiously. "I should never have known you."

"All the better," I answered, "for I have disguised myself as much as possible, so as to render it safe to come back here."

"You have been with the pastor, we heard," said Meyer; "how was it that you were not taken at the same time as he was?"

Feeling that it was best to be frank, I told him the whole story of how we came to be parted, to which he listened attentively. When I said that it was my earnest desire to find others who would join with me in making a great effort to free the pastor, he gave a low laugh.

"Why do you laugh?" I asked.

"First, because it was so mad of you to dream of freeing anyone, with that broken right arm of yours. Then, what could *you* do, even with your full strength, against the powers of Kolin?" His laugh irritated me, as did his scarcely concealed contempt of me.

"At least I could die in trying to rescue him," I said, "which is the most you yourself can do. If you will not help, say so, and I will seek other men of Kolin who are willing to dare something for their religion and their friends."

He grasped my shoulder roughly, but not unkindly.

"Gently, young master, not so fast," he said; "you need not think you are the only friend the pastor has in Kolin. I saw him arrested—I and four others, who were posted among the crowd to watch young Kopf deny his God—shame upon him! So far I have escaped detection, for I am a farmer's son, and I dwell some little way out of the town. The others are older men than myself, and not ones who would dash recklessly into peril, as you would; but, when we met in this room after that scene we swore an oath to each other that, come what might, there should be an attempt made to rescue the pastor. We are each pledged to find four others, strong, trusty, and dauntless, who are ready to take up arms at last for our faith and our friends. We meet to-night in that same barn to decide where and when the rescue is to take place. Now, do you see why I smiled to hear a boy like you speak as if none had thought of Master Reichner but yourself?"

I choked down the remnant of pride which his tone had stirred up within me, and told him how heartily glad I was that something was to be done for the pastor.

"Have you heard where he is kept?" I asked. "Is he very strictly confined, and do they treat him worse than Herr Müller and the others?"

"I only know that he is in one of the dungeons on the ground-floor of the prison, and that he is alone. But one of those who are pledged to the rescue is slightly known to the gaoler, so perchance he may find out some more."

"There would be no hope of seeing him, I suppose?" I asked.

"Oh, no, he may see no one. Of course you will come to our meeting to-night, will you not? Where are you lodging?"

I explained that I had walked into Kolin that morning from Kuttenberg, and that I had not ventured to visit any of my old friends for fear of recognition. Mistress Müller, I knew, would do anything she could for me; but it did not matter where I slept, so long as I was ready to be of any use I could to Master Reichner.

"You had better come home with me, then," said Meyer; "I came in just to look

at the prison, and see if it would be possible for the pastor to escape from it; but I fear it is too secure. Our best hope is from a rescue when he is being taken to the court-house for trial. But we shall discuss that this evening."

I thanked him most heartily for his offer of hospitality, and agreed to go with him, since there seemed nothing more just then to be done for Master Reichner or for Wilma. We rose up, therefore, paid our bill, and set forth from the inn on our way to the farm where he dwelt with his father.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIAL IN THE COURT-HOUSE.

NO one who was present at the secret gathering in the barn that night could have denied that our faith still possessed a body of strong, resolute men among its champions. They were, almost without exception, of humble birth, and their brawny arms and bronzed faces told of daily toil to earn their bread. But however various their calling in life, they were all united on two points, their religion and their determination to free Master Reichner from his prison. I may not here recall the discussion which took place, and the various plans which were proposed and rejected.

Although the youngest person present, I was, perhaps not unnaturally, brought to the front, as having been much of late in the

pastor's company; and the older men gave me a kindly hearing for my father's sake. The decision which we at last arrived at was a very daring one, and involved great risk to all who should carry it out. It was resolved that we should ascertain the exact hour of the pastor's trial, and that one of our number should be present to learn its result. If this were unfavourable, we determined to effect his rescue as he was being brought forth for the execution of his sentence, which would be flogging, mutilation, or even something worse. The time which elapsed between the trial and the carrying out of the sentence was usually only a day or two, so we had to be in readiness to act at a moment's notice. Someone of our number must be always on the alert in order to warn the rest of the proper time; and we purposed to make a sudden attack upon Master Reichner's guard, and carry him off to a spot where a horse would be in waiting. As for ourselves, we thought it best to wear masks of some kind in order to avoid recognition, since it would not be possible for us

all to escape, or to leave Kolin, even if our enterprise succeeded. Such, briefly, was our plan, and the old farmer Meyer, who was somewhat of an authority, appointed suitable men to each portion of the undertaking. I found myself overlooked, and only the older men engaged; but though I longed to do more than take part in the actual rescue, I would not obtrude my own desires, and therefore I sat silent.

"And how of Hugh Werner here?" asked young Meyer at last; "you know, comrades, he was thinking of setting about this business single-handed. Is he to have no share in the affair?"

"He shall go with Steinitz to the trial," said his father after a moment's thought; "they need not be seen together, and two reports are better than one."

I suppose my satisfaction showed itself in my face, for young Meyer gave one of his laughs, which always somewhat irritated me. But the conference soon broke up, and each man as he departed uttered some expression of hope and confidence in the success of the

coming attempt. They were not blind to their own peril, these tough, hard-headed peasants and artisans; but danger was so familiar in those days that men thought nothing of it in comparison with the interest of a deed of daring and rescue.

I passed the night with the Meyers, and next morning ventured into Kolin, and hovered near the convent of St. Ursula, in the hope of seeing or hearing something of Wilma. It was strange indeed to have the two who were dearest to me in the world both prisoners in different parts of the same town, and I felt divided in my anxiety about them. Yet I knew full well that Max Reichner's position was by far the graver in every way, and my heart sank as I thought of the slender hope we really had as to his ultimate escape.

As I stood near the convent gate the bell began to toll for matins, and a few men and women entered the chapel by the public entrance. Confiding in my disguise I passed in with the rest, and found a seat in the dimly-lighted building, from whence, through

some intervening pillars, I could see the Sisters kneeling in their places. For a long time I looked in vain for Wilma among the novices and lay-sisters, and I wondered whether she was excused attendance on the ground of her heretical up-bringing. This was scarcely likely, however, and I scanned again and again all the faces I could catch a glimpse of, thinking that she might have altered somewhat during my long absence, and that I might fail to recognize her by a casual glance. But my quest was vain, and when the service was over, and the monotonous Latin chant had ceased, I left the chapel much disappointed, and resumed my aimless wandering about the town. The sight of my old home roused up many memories, and a sort of magic attraction drew me again and again to its neighbourhood, though I knew that it was not wise to loiter about in the same spot. Once I was very greatly alarmed, for as I walked down one of the principal streets I came face to face with two of my former schoolfellows, one of whom was Rudolph von

Wosek, who had once before given me timely warning of danger. He still wore his scholar's cap, and was less altered than I was. In spite of my disguise, or perhaps because of it, he scrutinized my face curiously, and I fancied that he was about to accost me; but his mood changed, and he passed me in silence. I went forward hurriedly, fearing lest he should turn and ask me any compromising questions, and after that I was careful not to frequent the busier and more well-to-do portion of the town.

Having nothing special to do that day, and being possessed with a restless longing for action, I resolved to attend vespers at the convent chapel in the evening, and once more attempt to see Wilma; and accordingly I entered with several other persons, and posted myself in a different part of the building, so as to command a better view of all the Sisters. As I eagerly sought to discover her, my eyes rested on a face which I knew—a bright, sparkling, fair face, belonging to one of a group of maidens standing with the nuns, but habited in ordinary dress. I

knew her at once to be the Lady Gertrude von Külmwald, and I felt my cheeks grow hot with pleasure and surprise. Evidently she was either on a visit to the convent, or had entered it for a short time to learn music, embroidery, and those other arts in which the Sisters were proficient. The sight of her merry face, now composed into suitable gravity, gave me great satisfaction, and I came away with a vague feeling that if Wilma could get to know my former acquaintance, she would not be without a friend in the convent.

I am now approaching the most difficult part of my record, for, although every event of the days which followed is indelibly fixed on my brain, it is almost impossible to write down what happened in such a manner that those who read may in any fitting measure understand.

On the morning of my third day in Kolin I was helping young Meyer on the farm—glad to be able to do anything to repay them for their hospitality, but sorely crippled by my unlucky arm, which, by the way, had

given me no little pain during the previous few days. As we worked together at one of the hayricks in the yard, replacing some hay which a storm had blown down the night before, a man came towards us from the house, and I recognized him as one of the band who had sworn to release Master Reichner.

"Meyer," I said, touching my companion on the arm, "yonder comer brings news, if I mistake not."

"It is Franz Ort," the young man said, throwing down his hay-fork, and going to meet the approaching messenger, while I followed speedily, eager to hear what he had come to tell.

"The trial is to-day," Ort said in a low voice. "I heard so this morning, on good authority. It will be at midday, in the court-house, and you had best be speedy," he added, turning to me, "if you desire to be in your place. Steinitz has already started."

I thanked him, put on my coat and cap, and hurried off towards Kolin, the Meyers'

farm being above a mile from the town. My heart beat fast as I entered the well-remembered court-house, where, as a school-boy, I had often been to witness the trial of petty thieves and brawlers. Now, however, there was a different air about the place; it was fast filling with spectators, some loudly denouncing the vile heretic who was to be tried, others merely idle gazers, who had entered for an hour's amusement. I espied Steinitz in the distance, but I should not have deemed it wise to speak with him, even if I had been near enough to do so.

I tried to determine from the talk of those about me what the pastor's sentence was likely to be, but there was so much difference of opinion that I could only shudder at the thought of how great variety of suffering it would be possible for them to inflict upon him. I strove to curb my impatience and conceal my torments of suspense, but I doubt not that several persons must have noticed me, as after events proved.

The judge entered the building at length—a hard-faced, bigoted man, whom I remem-

bered well, as indeed I had cause, for it was he who had condemned my father, Master Müller, and many another of our friends. He took his seat at the table, and two or three priests came forward and spoke a few words to him in an undertone, after which the order was given to bring in the prisoner.

The next minute Max Reichner was led in between two of the civic guard and placed before the tribunal, amid a murmur of execration from the spectators, who elbowed each other eagerly to catch a glimpse of this dangerous heretic, who had at last been brought to justice. I felt myself grow hot and cold by turns at the sight of my friend, for surely never had a few days so changed a man of his years. When I saw him last he was upright, active, abounding in health and spirits, hopeful, and apparently careless of the danger which he had so often escaped before. Was it indeed the pastor who stood there, bent, haggard, scarcely able to keep upright, and with such a look of physical suffering on his face? A woman near me

murmured: "The torture, poor soul!" and then I understood, and a great wave of horror and indignation swept over me, and I could have rushed forward then and there and flung myself in my mad, impotent fury on that cold, heartless judge, who looked only too ready to condemn my friend. I had still sense enough, however, to keep quiet and listen with straining ears to the false and cruel accusations that were brought forward by priests and laymen, and to the comments of the judge, which showed plainly enough which way his sympathies went. They accused the pastor of heresy of the deepest dye; of sedition against the civil and religious powers; of many foul acts in public and private, which were as contrary to his nature as darkness is to light. And then, worst of all, when these witnesses had spoken, there stepped forward a tall, knightly figure, which I knew only too well. It was the Baron von Krakyow. I will not write down all that he said, for even now it makes my blood boil to think of it; and as I watched Max Reichner's face and saw it flush and quiver

with suppressed pain and indignation, I knew that this was the hardest part of his trial. Von Krakyow, oblivious alike of truth and honour, accused him of acts which the pastor would have scorned to commit, bringing in the name of his own wife, the unhappy Lady Eva, with a heartless barbarity which caused many a woman present to look at him with unfeigned contempt, noble though he was. But his foul lies succeeded, as the devil himself intended that they should. His accusation was the last blow at the pastor's life, and it sufficed. They let him speak a few words of self-defence, but I think that he had been so thunderstruck by this last cruel charge that, weakened as he was, he could not rally his strength for a powerful appeal, or even a declaration of his opinions.

He was too proud to plead for his life, and moreover he would not deny that the charge of opposition to the Church of Rome was true.

"I *have* preached the gospel of Christ in every place where I have been," he said; "I am not ashamed to own it. I protest

with all my strength against the doctrines taught by the Church of Rome, in so far as they differ from the Word of God. But as to these other charges, I can only affirm, in the sight of God, who judges all men, that they are utterly false—false from first to last. The Baron von Krakyow knows that his words are false, and that I am innocent of all these crimes that he imputes to me."

"Silence!" broke in the judge, holding up his hand; "we will hear no more of this. The fact that the prisoner pleads guilty to the charge of heresy is more than enough to condemn him, and since he has refused, under powerful persuasion, to recant his opinions, we need spend no more time in listening to his words. As to the charge of the Baron von Krakyow," he went on, turning with a bow to the knight, "I deem the word of a noble, versed in honour and chivalry, more important than the self-excuses of a perjured and pestilent heretic. I therefore do decree in the name of the king that Max Reichner be first publicly flogged, and then burned in the market-place until he be dead."

The court-house seemed to swim before my eyes, and I well-nigh cried aloud. Almost all the spectators of the trial appeared to be surprised by the enormity of the sentence, and there was a low murmur of disapproval from some of the more moderate citizens.

The condemned man turned one look on the Baron von Krakyow, who stood, dark and satisfied, in the front of the court. I think the Baron could never have forgotten that look until he died. The anger had all died out of Max Reichner's face, and to my mind it was just such a glance as our Lord turned upon Peter, full of reproach and yet as full of forgiveness. But he did not speak a word, and they took him back to prison hastily, for fear the temper of the people should turn.

I hardly know how I got out of the town and back once more to the Meyers' farm, for I felt like one in a dream, and as if those fatal words could not indeed have been spoken. Although I had long been familiar with danger and death, it seemed beyond belief that Master Reichner was to meet an end of such suffering and shame as this. My whole nature rebelled

against it, my brain refused to grasp it as even a possibility.

When I had poured out my story to the Meyers, I sat down with my head on my hands and waited for them to speak, not a little surprised that they were not more startled and shocked by the sentence.

"It is very much what I feared," said the old farmer at last in his quiet, stolid fashion; "I scarce looked for a milder sentence than that."

"Nor I," agreed the son, "if one thinks of all that the pastor has done for our Church."

"And you still think it possible to save him?" I cried, looking up eagerly, with hope reviving in my heart.

"Just as possible as it was before we knew the sentence," said young Meyer shortly.

"And all the more need for strong arms and brave hearts to dare anything, so as to rescue him," added his father; "but how of the other prisoners, Master Werner? you have told us naught of them."

In very deed I had forgotten poor Master Müller and the rest in my anxiety about my

friend, and I was forced to confess that I knew nothing of their fate. Steinitz, however, coming in later, both confirmed my account of the pastor's trial, and told us of what had passed after I left. Young Kopf, the man who had almost recanted on the day of Max Reichner's arrest, was to meet his death at the same time as the pastor. Master Müller and the others were sentenced to mutilation and long terms of close imprisonment, only too likely to result in a speedy release by fever or starvation, as we very well knew.

That night the band of rescuers, thirty or more in number, met in our old rendezvous, the barn in the pine wood, and my spirits rose as I saw their resolute faces and heard them swear to rescue the pastor or die in the attempt. Farmer Meyer agreed to give his best and swiftest horse—no little sacrifice to a man of small means—that it might be in readiness just outside Kolin, for Master Reichner to mount and ride away. They all spoke confidently and boldly, and did not doubt their power to carry out their resolve. Of the after risk to themselves they were all

careless; and indeed, who ever knew brave men shrink back from a gallant enterprise on account of personal danger? All was therefore carefully arranged, and each man knew his task, and declared himself able to provide his own weapons. I retired to rest that night more hopeful, less despairing, than in the morning I could have believed possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

"NOT ACCEPTING DELIVERANCE."

THE execution of Master Reichner and Johann Kopf was appointed for the third day after their trial, and there was thus a whole day in which nothing could be done. I may here mention that poor Kopf was not to be included in the projected rescue, for at our barn-meeting the men had sternly agreed that all their efforts would be needed to free the pastor, without risking their lives to release a cowardly renegade. I pitied the poor fellow heartily, but dared not oppose my opinion against that of the rest. Men are hard and stern in these bitter days, and none were more despised by the faithful than those who had lapsed.

On the morning of the next day I came across the Baron von Krakyow, who was

staying at the principal inn of the place, in order, as I did not doubt, to be able to witness his enemy's end.

He is gone to his account now, and one may not write too harshly of the dead, but that day, when I saw his evil face and knew that he was Master Reichner's bitterest foe, I hated him with all my heart and soul. The sight of him strolling leisurely towards the cathedral, while it stirred up these feelings of enmity in me, happily suggested another and different thought. Could it be possible that the Baroness his wife was also in Kolin, or had he left her at home? Would it not be a course well fitted to his cruel purposes to make her witness, or at least be aware of, the death of the man she had loved? I turned into the inn, scarcely knowing what I did, and asked if the Baroness von Krakyow were staying there with her husband. I was informed that she was within, but shut into her own chamber, to which she would admit no one.

This news surprised me not a little, for I could hardly believe that the Baron had

dragged her thither for no other purpose than that of witnessing his vengeance; but on further inquiry I learned that they had been a week in the place—the Baron having come to Kolin to accomplish certain long-promised devotions at the shrine of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. He had brought with him a numerous retinue, and the Baroness had several of her waiting-women to attend her, so it was evident that their visit to Kolin was altogether unconnected with the arrest and trial of my friend. Doubtless, however, the Baron was well pleased to be able to bear witness against Master Reichner, and I could imagine the sorrow which the Lady Eva must be passing through at this time.

Longing to comfort her with the news of our intended rescue, I ventured to crave admittance to her, on the plea that I was a peasant from her own estate, by name Peter Wisp. Tardily enough the serving-maid conveyed my message to the lady, but she came down with more speed to bid me ascend to the chamber where, she told me, the Baroness sat alone.

As I climbed the narrow stairway I tried to frame a sentence in which to begin my self-introduction, but no sooner had the door closed behind the servant, leaving me face to face with the lady, than she sprang from her seat and regarded me with anxious curiosity.

"I think," she began, "that some mistake has been made. You are not the person whom I supposed was wishing to speak with me."

I came to the point at once, for time was short.

"I am Max Reichner's friend, Hugh Werner," I said briefly. "I am but disguised for the sake of safety."

"Ah!" She gave a little gasp of relief. "Seat yourself here, I pray you, and tell me how you came here, and wherefore you would speak with me."

She had been weeping, I could see, but she spoke quite calmly, and in spite of my trouble and anxiety, I was struck afresh by the beauty and the sweetness of her face.

"I saw the Baron von Krakyow in the street," I began, seating myself as she bade me, "and I deemed it possible that you were

also in Kolin, and might be willing to hear from me news of the pastor."

She bent her head without speaking, and I went on hurriedly :

"You have heard, I doubt not, that he is taken at last, and condemned to die? But be not too much cast down, for he will be rescued, he will make his escape, he will be free to-morrow!"

"What mean you?" asked the young Baroness, raising her head quickly.

I recounted to her our plan for his rescue, and repeated the assurances which had so raised my own hopes the night before. She listened eagerly, the colour coming and going on her face, and her hands clasped before her.

"Oh, if I dared believe it!" she said; "if he could only be spared! You must not think that I should ever see him again," she went on, half apologetically; "but if I knew that he was free and safe, I could bear anything, everything."

"And he *shall*, he *must* be free!" I said eagerly; "with our strong band of determined

men we cannot fail in our enterprise. They all say so, and they are not men who make empty boasts!"

"If I could only help!" said the Baroness, half to herself; "but at least I can pray. Surely God will hear us, and deliver him. He has so much work to do in the world."

We talked on for a while, and I was rejoiced to see the cloud lift, as it were, from her face, and the sunshine return into her eyes; we were both confident of success, and strong in our belief that God *could* not let His faithful servant perish. But God's ways are not our ways, and He does not always answer our prayers in the way we expect and desire.

As we talked I chanced to mention having seen the Lady Gertrude von Külmwald in the convent chapel, and to this the Baroness responded at once:

"Yes, I know she is there. I have seen her several times since I have been in Kolin; she is spending some months there for her education."

At this I bethought me of Wilma, and asked the Baroness to remember my little

sister if she were visiting the convent again, and to recommend her to the kindness of the Lady Gertrude, which she readily promised to do. Soon after this I took my leave, and she had the goodness to assure me that my visit had cheered her inexpressibly. As I walked away from the inn, some words which she had uttered kept ringing in my ears.

"Why," she had said, "do you not try to get to him in prison? With your disguise, and your ready tongue, you could surely contrive it. It would be worth much to spare him the needless misery of a night spent in looking forward to death on the morrow."

It was true, and I would gladly have told him, if I could, of the rescue which awaited him on the road to execution; but how was I to compass this end? Every possible expedient had been already talked over and put aside by the Meyers and other friends, and I could hit on no plan for getting access to him, closely confined as he surely was.

Yet the more I thought of it the more I became possessed of an indescribable longing

to see him, and a vague yet haunting dread that it might be the last time. What if, after all, our enterprise should fail? Should I not for ever reproach myself if I left one stone unturned in order to secure a last talk with him?

At length I resolved to make one bold attempt, and if that failed I should take it as a sign that I was not to be allowed to see him. Going into a small baker's shop, I purchased a couple of loaves of bread, which I carried straight to the prison itself, asking admittance at the door of the gaoler's lodge. A woman came to speak with me, and as I anxiously watched her face, I felt that there was some kindliness in her expression and manner.

Speaking in homely peasant phrases, I explained my errand, and told her without concealment what boon I had come to crave.

"The prisoner, Master Reichner, had been good to me oftentimes," I said, "and I would fain repay my debt of gratitude by giving him a little bread to strengthen him for his suffering on the morrow. Would she convey the loaves

to him, or—dare I ask it?—would she get permission for a poor peasant lad to visit the condemned man? It would do no harm," I pleaded, "and the good God would recompense her kindness."

At first she absolutely refused to do more than convey the loaves to the prisoner, but after a time she softened, and when I told her that I was without father or mother, and that my only sister was in the convent of St. Ursula, she began to take some interest in me, as I could see by her face.

"Well," said she at last, "I will ask my husband, who keeps the keys; but I doubt whether he will be able to let you see him. He is weak and ill—this heretic prisoner, and the priests have strictly charged that care be taken that he be able to come forth to-morrow."

I tried to conceal my eagerness to see my friend, and agreed to wait just within the door, while the woman went to speak with her husband in the prison itself. How well I remember those long minutes of waiting! Even now I can see that low-roofed, smoke-

stained kitchen, with its dark old furniture and open hearth, where the pot swung in the draught over the glowing embers. I can hear the sounds that came from the street outside, and the babbling of the gaoler's little child in its cradle, and the beating of my own heart as I stood gazing and thinking. At last I heard the footsteps of the woman returning, accompanied by a heavier tread, and next moment the keeper of the gaol was scanning me all over with keen, inquiring eyes.

"You want to see the heretic Reichner?" he said. "In truth, you are very bold to ask it. Do you bring a permission from the Town Council? The prisoners are allowed to see no one."

"'Tis an ignorant country lad, who knows nothing of prison way," put in his wife persuasively; while I stood, cap in hand, clasping my two loaves with a grip that well-nigh broke them.

"Nay, master," I said, "I bring no permission. How could I ask those noble magistrates and officers? I am but a humble

friend of Master Reichner's, and I only crave your leave to bid him farewell."

"You bear no weapon?" he asked suspiciously.

"Search me!" I replied; and, in truth, my faded and worn garments and tanned skin bore witness to my lowly position.

"You say, husband, that the heretic is a brave man, and too good for the stake!" said the woman; "will you not do him the one small favour of letting him see this poor lad?"

The gaoler rebuked his wife for repeating his own rashly-uttered opinion of his prisoner; but nevertheless her argument had weight, and he said, without attempting to search me:

"Well, follow me, lad. I will take the risk of admitting you to him for a short space."

Looking gratefully at the woman I followed the gaoler across a paved courtyard, where soldiers paced slowly to and fro, keeping guard over the prison itself. After passing through several doors we began to descend a narrow and steep stairway, which terminated

in a dark passage. Here I saw several barred and bolted doors, and before one of these the gaoler stopped, fitting a ponderous key into the lock. The heavy door creaked and groaned on its hinges as it swung back to admit me, and within the cell the darkness seemed almost as profound as in the passage.

"There—enter!" said the gaoler, pushing me in; "I shall return ere long to fetch you away."

The door was shut, the key turned, and I made a step forward in the semi-darkness. There was a weird and ghastly feeling in this underground dungeon, and for a brief space I wondered if I had been trapped, and was in very deed a prisoner, and alone in the cell.

But next moment I heard his voice—the voice I knew so well—and there could no longer be any mistake.

"Good-day," he said courteously, not knowing me at first; "may I ask if you are come to be my fellow-prisoner?"

Then, as my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I saw that Master Reichner was lying

on a low bed of some sort against the wall. Something seemed to rise in my throat and well-nigh choke me, as I flung myself down on my knees on the stones beside him.

"Do you not know me?—it is Hugh!" I said, striving to keep back a sob.

"Hugh, my dearest lad!" he said, holding out his hands to me, with eagerness and delight in his tone, "this is a piece of comfort I did not dream of. But," he added suddenly, "does it mean that you also are taken?"

"Nay, I am still free, and have got access to you, I hardly know how, for a short time only."

"How fares it with you?" he asked, making me sit down on his straw bed; "how goes the arm? Is it giving you much discomfort?"

"It is nothing—not worth speaking of," I said, almost impatiently; "but are you indeed so ill and weak as they said?"

"You see I am obliged to keep to this bed for to-night," he said, with one of his old smiles. "I want to be strong for to-morrow, and these fellows know how to weaken one, body and soul."

"Dastardly villains!" I cried, clenching my hand fiercely, till Master Reichner quieted me with an authoritative touch on my arm.

"Do not say that," he said; "let us not spoil this little time together by abusing them. I have learned to forgive them, and you must do the same, Hugh, for my sake."

"You have forgiven that baron?" I said between my teeth. "Ah, but he shall live to rue the day when he perjured himself so as to gain your death. When he hears that you are free and strong again, he will——"

"Hugh, what has come to you?" remonstrated Master Reichner; "why do you talk of freedom? Surely, my dear fellow, you know what sentence was passed upon me, and that it is to be carried out to-morrow?"

Then I poured out all the story of our plan for his rescue, of the solemn oath taken by us all, of our brave and resolute band, all bent on his freedom. "By this time to-morrow," I finished eagerly, "you shall be free as the wind, and far from Kolin and your enemies!"

He had listened to my torrent of words in

silence hitherto, but now he raised himself, and spoke slowly and with deep feeling.

"Hugh, I am unworthy of this devotion—they are noble fellows, and I believe they would succeed."

"Ah! then all will be well!" I exclaimed. "We only needed your knowledge of the affair, and your promise to be in readiness at our first signal."

"But even though I thank you and them all from the depths of my heart," he went on, "I cannot accept this means of escape."

"You cannot—you will not!" I said in amazement. "Do you doubt our courage? Do you think we are not willing to run a little risk to save you?"

"It is not that—on my honour it is not that! Listen, Hugh, and I will tell you. I could not possibly allow all those brave fellows to throw away life and liberty and homes and friends, on the chance of saving me. They are noble enough to think lightly of their peril, but you must see how their whole lives would be wrecked by such a deed. There are not enough of them to form a definite rising for

our faith—which is a possibility I have often dreamed of. They would be outlawed, persecuted, driven from home, even were they to succeed in their generous purpose. I would not have the happiness and comparative safety of all those men wrecked on my behalf—would you, Hugh, yourself? And there is another reason—a strong one, though you will not like to hear it."

"What is it?" I asked in a low voice; my spirits sunk to the very depths by his words.

"I am certain that I could not sit a horse even to save my life," said Master Reichner quietly. "I shall just be able to get to the market-place to-morrow, but no more. You see these last few days have made a wreck of me physically. God grant I may still be kept spiritually on my feet. I will not grieve your kind heart by dwelling on the time since we last parted, but it has made me many a time long to die, and be quit of it all! It is only natural. I do not blame them unreservedly, for you see I have been able to hold out against them so far."

Then, as I did not speak, he went on, half to himself—

"I have faced death many a time before, and I believe I shall have the strength given me to keep firm in my faith to the end. And even if the details of it are hard to endure, there is the glorious hope held out to me on the other side."

But I could not bear this, and with tears I implored him not to give up the chance offered him of escape.

"What if you cannot ride for a while?" I said. "We will carry you—we will conceal you—we will save you in spite of yourself."

And then, bringing forth my strongest plea last, I told him of my talk with the Lady Eva, and how her heart was set on his release.

"For her sake," I pleaded, "do not throw your life away! Do not break her heart by refusing to save yourself in an honourable way."

He leaned his head against the wall for a minute without speaking, and even in the dim light I could see how white and worn he looked.

"I would have given anything for her to be far from here, and know naught of all this till it is over," he said. "It is terrible to feel that she is suffering through me—and that her name was used as that fellow dared to use it yesterday. Hugh, that was harder than all else! And yet, even for her, I cannot falter in my resolve. I do not believe that it is the will of God that I should allow this attempt to be made, so in all earnestness I pray you, dear comrade, not to urge it on me further. You must tell them all from me how deeply I feel their noble devotion, and thank them from the bottom of my heart. But this poor body will never be worth anything again, and even were I to escape I should only be a helpless cripple."

"And I—I have brought it all on you," I said in the depth of bitterness. "It was for me that you ventured to Kolin; it was I who should have gone—I who ought to be here instead of you. How can I bear this intolerable burden of misery and self-reproach?"

"Hugh—my dear lad! you must not think of such a thing as this!" he said earnestly.

"You know what a charm danger has ever had for me, and I should have come to Kolin, I doubt not, had you and Wilma never been in my mind. I beg you, nay, I command you, not to reproach yourself in this matter. It is all in the hands of One wiser than ourselves, who holds our lives in His keeping, and if He sees that my work here is done, what shall hinder me from going to Him? And hearken, Hugh, for I have so much to say, and we know not how long they will give us. I want to leave you my work as a legacy, if you feel called of God to do it. You must try to leave Kolin, and if possible go abroad for a time and see the world, and learn much that will be of use to you. You are too young to take up definite pastoral work as yet, and I would not lay it on you as a burden, but I believe that you have much before you in the future. I should like you to seek out Dr. Grauwitz, of Zurich, a friend and fellow-student of mine, and ask him for counsel and help when you need it; he is a good man and wise, and will put you in the way of making a start in a fresh country.

If you can take the little sister away, too, so much the better. There is one other thing I want you to do for me, Hugh. Will you see the Baroness von Krakyow for me, and bid her farewell? She knows all I would fain say to her, and she will not misinterpret my love. Tell her that I have fully forgiven her husband the wrong he has done me, as I hope my sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. Tell her that the thought of her has kept me strong many a time, in trouble and difficulty, and that I know we shall meet again, where we shall be as the angels of God. My dearest, my gentle little Eva! God grant her a measure of peace here on earth, and patience to bear her sore trials. Hugh, I charge you, if ever you have the chance of helping her or speaking a word to comfort her, do it for my sake."

He paused, as if wearied by the effort of speaking so long on the things nearest his heart.

"I will, while I have life and strength," I said. "All that you say shall be a sacred charge, never, never to be forgotten."

"There is so much more I want to say," he said with a stifled sigh; "I feel that I have left so many duties undone and come so far short of my ideals and aims. How can I dare to hope that God will still strengthen me to the end, unworthy as I am of all His goodness to me?"

"It is for His sake," I tried to say; "surely He will keep you steadfast?"

But it was of little use for me to try to speak words of comfort to him, my master, my elder brother, whom I felt to be so immeasurably above me. I could only look into his face with my whole soul going out to him in sympathy and reverence, feeling myself powerless to say anything in this solemn hour.

"I fear I am faithless and despondent just now," he said at last. "You must not think that it is so always, but this pain and weakness have unmanned me somewhat. Hugh, you must never think that I regretted my life work; my only sorrow is that I did not sooner give myself up to God's service and serve Him more faithfully. It is such a

glorious service, and the joy so far outweighs the sorrow. One would die without a murmur for an earthly king, so why should it be hard to die for our Lord Himself? Look only to Him, and He will keep you strong and faithful, Hugh, all your life. Do not let anything come between you and His love. His smile is worth living and dying for, and He has promised us a sure victory in the end."

"Without you I shall be a friendless, homeless waif," I said brokenly after a pause. "You have been such a friend to me as few were ever blessed with. How can I thank you for all your goodness to me?"

"We have had much happiness together," he answered with his old smile, "and one day we shall meet each other again, when all this is over for us both. It is a great joy to me to feel that you know who to look to as your Friend when I am gone, for having Him you can never be unbearably lonely. One more thing I want to ask of you, Hugh," he added suddenly; "you say you are staying with the Meyers? Then I want you to keep away from Kolin to-morrow. It would only pain

you to be there, and it would not help me to know that you were suffering for me. Moreover, your impetuous tongue might lead you into trouble, which I would gladly avoid. Will you give me your promise, Hugh?"

I knew not what to say, with his eyes waiting eagerly for my answer. I would fain have been with him to the end, and yet I could not deny his last request.

"If you desire it, I will promise," I said at last, and he thanked me for being willing to obey his wish, adding:

"You must pray for me, Hugh; that will help me more than all else."

"And you are still absolutely sure about the rescue?" I said wistfully, as he paused.

"Absolutely! But you will not let them feel hurt by my refusal, will you? I think in time they will be satisfied with my decision. Stay! I will give you this old signet ring, which at one time I used to wear, as a token that you bring word from me and none other. I have nothing else to leave you as a remembrance, Hugh."

As he drew the ring from his pocket and

placed it in my hand, I heard footsteps approaching along the stone passage without, and I knew that the time for our parting had come.

"I cannot tell you how much I had been wishing to see you once more," Master Reichner said tenderly, as I grasped his hand with a pressure that had to take the place of words. "You must not think about the pain for me, Hugh, but of the honour God has done me, and of the joys beyond. Farewell, my dear and true comrade."

I had one last glimpse of his face, one last clasp of his hand, one murmured farewell, and then I was parted from him for ever in this world, and went forth like one in a dream, to face life without him.

CHAPTER XV.

"FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH."

WHEN first I set myself to write this record, I had no intention or wish to intrude so much of my own story upon those who might chance to read it. But now, looking back to that terrible time, every detail of which is as clear to me as if it befell only yesterday, I see that it would have been impossible to relate much that I wanted to tell otherwise than as things which I myself saw and knew. Briefly, therefore, I will describe the events of the next few days, trusting that I may be pardoned for speaking of my own paltry concerns along with those which are of so much graver import.

I left the prison feeling like one in a dream, and as if all the world around me

were covered with a cloud of sorrow and cruelty. Seeking the Meyers, I told them all that had passed between me and my friend, and sadly assured them that it was but too true that the pastor had absolutely and finally refused to accept the attempt for his rescue.

When I made known to them the state of his health, they agreed that he might be right; and yet it came as a cruel blow to all the brave fellows who had so willingly offered their lives for his deliverance, and some of them would hardly be persuaded to relinquish the attempt.

"We will carry him," they said, their faces moved with a strange tenderness; "what matter the extra risk, if he can but be saved? And if it is only to die, it shall at least be among friends."

But the older men prevailed at last, seeing that the case was really hopeless; and so, with sad hearts and stern faces, they all returned to their various duties. I hope I was able to make them realize as he would have wished that it was from no

churlish ingratitude that Max Reichner refused to accept their sacrifice, nor from any want of faith in their courage and devotion. They knew that he trusted them and thanked them, and with this we were all fain to be content.

As it befell, I was obliged, whether I would or no, to obey his last request, and stay away from Kolin on the morrow, for after the little company had dispersed, I found myself utterly exhausted and prostrate. My broken arm, which had given me much pain ever since I left Kuttenberg, could no longer be disregarded, and by morning I was in a high fever, and fit for nothing but restless tossing on my attic bed at the Meyers'.

Oh, the unspeakable misery of that day! The hours dragged on one by one, and as I buried my burning head in my pillow I knew that my friend, my master, was suffering all that man could inflict, and with no one to raise an arm in his defence.

The sun glared down to mock my anguish, and the birds sang aloud outside my window.

I longed to curse God and die. I cannot write of it even now, for my heart grows sick within me at the memory. At the time I thought I should never outlive my distress, but even the keenest sorrow is tempered by time, and I am learning, through many a bitter lesson, to know, in spite of our rebellious repining, that God's will is always best.

The Meyers returned at sunset, and I dragged myself down to hear what they had to tell. They were both silent men, and that day's work had not been what anyone would choose to speak much of. Moreover, I think they desired to spare me all they could, seeing my state; but I felt impelled to hear it all, and little by little I got them to tell me what they had seen.

Reichner was led out about midday, they said, and from their places in the crowded market-square they could see him to the end. He was so weak that they almost had to carry him ere the square was reached, but his courage and resolution never for a moment wavered. Beside him came Kopf, the back-

slider, whom he tried to comfort by word and glance, until he was rudely prevented by the guard. The executioners were speedy in their work, for the crowd was very large, and many a low murmur of disapproval showed that the hearts of the men of Kolin repented of the foul deed that was being done.

Max Reichner was not allowed to speak one word to the people, but Meyer said that the very sight of him did more than many words could have done. Ah, but I cannot write down all they told me. He was brave to the end, as I knew he would be; but, mercifully for him, his bodily strength was not equal to his spirit, and he lost consciousness under the merciless lash. They think that he felt nothing of the fire, if indeed he was not already dead when they fastened him to the stake. Kopf suffered much more, but he too was upheld to the last, and triumphantly redeemed his character in the eyes of all who saw him die.

How cold these words of mine seem! But the story was burned into my heart and brain

in letters of fire that day, though indeed it seemed to me as if it must be of some other man, and not Max Reichner, that they were telling me. I could not realize it then, nor for long afterwards, and that night I lost my hold for a time on the world and its troubles in the unconsciousness of fever. The Meyers cared for me with the truest kindness and hospitality while I lay like a useless log upon their hands. I believe they were glad to do all they did for Max Reichner's sake. The fever diminished in time, and I came back again to life and labour, to take up the legacy that he had left me, and to fulfil as well as I could the injunctions which he had laid upon me.

As soon as I was strong enough I made my way to the inn where the Baroness von Krakyow had been staying, but I found that, as I had feared, her husband had left the town almost directly after my friend's death, taking her with him. She had left no message for me, and I could gather little concerning her, except that she looked unspeakably sad; "which," added the woman who told me,

"seemed strange for a lady of such beauty and such wealth."

Then I tried to find out something about Wilma, but in this also I was unsuccessful, though I went as often as I dared to the convent chapel, in the hope of seeing her. At last, however, as I was about to give up my quest in despair, and leave Kolin without any news of my sister, I obtained what I wanted in an unexpected way. I had attended vespers for the third time in succession (besides other services during those days), and was leaving the building very disconsolately, when I felt a touch on the arm. Turning hastily, I saw a lay sister, who asked me if my name was Peter Wisp. I recollected myself and assented, and was bidden to follow her into the parlour of the Superior herself, where, said the sister, a lady would speak with me. Surprised and bewildered, I followed her along several passages into a bare yet stately chamber, where I found myself in the presence of a tall, elderly woman whom I knew to be the Mother Superior. Beside her, smiling and charming as of old, stood the little Lady

Gertrude von Külmwald, who held out her hand to me frankly on my entrance, and seemed pleased when I raised it to my lips.

"Is this the lad with whom you begged leave to speak, child?" said the elder lady. "Say, then, what you wish, before the bell sounds for refection."

"I should not have known you, Master Peter," began the Lady Gertrude in her merry tones; but I think she saw in my face an entreaty not to trifle, for her own face grew grave in an instant. "I have a message for you from the Baroness von Krakyow," she said; "she left Kolin some time ago, and took your sister with her."

"How?" interposed the Superior—"is the boy a brother of the little heretic Wilma?"

"So the Baroness told me, madam," said the Lady Gertrude, "though I do not quite understand it all."

"Then he must be the son of that Master Werner who, if I mistake not, suffered for his errors nearly a year ago."

"How, is your name Werner—not Wisp?" asked the Lady Gertrude. "I never knew

your sister's second name. And are you too a heretic?"

"Yes," I said, rather wearily. Wilma was safe, Max Reichner was dead; it mattered little to me whether they took me as well.

The Mother Superior eyed me in silence for a time, and then said slowly:

"Do you know that I could give you up into the hands of the Holy Church to receive the reward of your evil ways? Or are you willing to take warning from the fate of the heretic pastor last month, and enter the safe path before it be too late?"

"Madam," I said, "I am here in your hands, and I suppose that if you will, you can deliver me up to my enemies. As for recanting, I hope that I shall have the same strength given me to hold firm that all Kolin saw last month in Master Reichner."

"Nay," cried the Lady Gertrude, catching one of the Superior's hands, her face full of anxiety, "I entreat you, dear Mother, to let him go in safety. It was I who brought him hither, and I could never be happy again if I had been the means of causing

anyone's death. Indeed, there is no harm in him, and see how thin and ill he looks!"

"Who said I was going to give him up?" asked the Mother Superior shortly.

"Ah, thank you. I could not believe that you, who are so kind, would wish the poor fellow ill." And the girl's fair face was once more smiling as ever.

"I will not harm you," went on the elder lady, "for indeed it is none of my affair; but I would counsel you to leave Kolin as soon as you can. Your sister, as the Lady Gertrude has told you, is with the Baroness von Krakyow, who entreated me to allow her to take charge of the child."

"I thank you with all my heart, madam," I said, the tears coming into my eyes at her kind words. "I intend to leave the town as soon as possible, and make my way out of the country. Now that I know Wilma is safe, there is nothing to keep me. My parents are both dead, and——"

"And the heretic pastor was your best friend, you told me at Külmwald," said Gertrude pityingly.

"You speak of your sister being now safe," said the Mother Superior, "as if she were not well treated here; but I think you are unjust, young heretic!"

"Pardon me," I cried; "I meant no discourtesy, madam, and I thank you for your kindness both to her and to me."

A bell beginning to sound without, I took my leave of the two ladies, and left the convent with a lighter heart than when I had entered it.

On the very next day I took my departure from Kolin, knowing that I was not likely to see my birthplace again for a long time to come. I walked past my old home, and the prison, and across the market-square, all filled with sad and yet not wholly bitter memories. My way out of the town led through the narrow street where I had first seen Master Reichner, and the children were playing, and the soldiers strolling and chatting, just as on that day so long ago. I seemed to see him once more, facing the drunken soldier, his strong, upright figure and resolute face contrasting forcibly with the hulking

form and savage countenance of the other. I almost heard the firm, clear tones of his voice. It was more than I could bear, and with one choking sob I turned away, and went out into the world to seek my fortune all alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HE, BEING DEAD, YET SPEAKETH."

IT is six years to-day since I left Kolin, and I have been reading over these pages, written at various times during my exile, and wondering whether I should show them to Wilma or not. As a record of Max Reichner they fall utterly short of what I would have wished to write; and indeed no poor words of mine could ever tell what manner of man he was. And yet I cannot bring myself to burn the manuscript, incomplete and unworthy though it be, since it may be better than nothing at all in serving to recall to my mind some of the talks and adventures which we had together. Nay, I will keep it, for the reading of his loving words brings strength to me; and before I set forth for Bohemia once more I will give it into my

sister's hands, only adding to it a few closing words.

Wonderful indeed has been the way by which I have been led since I left Kolin alone, weak and penniless, that autumn morning. I made my way on foot out of the country, meeting many adventures on the road, and more than once narrowly escaping death by starvation; but in due time the friendly shelter of Switzerland was reached, and I knew what it was to be in a land where persecution had ceased.

As Master Reichner had counselled me, I sought out his friend Dr. Grauwitz, a learned physician in Zurich, and this worthy gentleman treated me with the greatest courtesy and kindness, enabling me to complete my education while working for my bread. My life in Zurich was a somewhat hard and lonely one, but I soon made many good friends, and learned very much which was of the greatest service to me in opening and training my mind. I am sure now that Master Reichner was as wise and far-seeing as ever in his advice to me to leave Bohemia

for a while; but many a time my exile was exceedingly bitter to me, and I longed to be back among my own people and in my own dear country. Of Wilma I heard news at long intervals, when she was able to send me a packet by some passing merchant or travelling pastor. I learned that she was safe and happy under the protection of the Baroness von Krakyow, but, as I gathered, the fair lady herself suffered much from the cruel temper and the jealous feelings of her husband, who grew each year more morose and domineering. Perhaps the fact that she bore him no children may have increased the dislike with which he had long come to regard her, and it made my heart ache to think of her constant sorrow and her patient endurance.

But it was not to continue for ever, and the day came when the measure of his evil doings was full. Returning half stupefied with drink from a feast at a neighbouring castle, his horse stumbled and threw him heavily on the ground, where he struck his head against a stone and expired a

little while after. His body was carried home to the Lady Eva, and buried with all the ceremony usual in the case of a valiant defender of the Church, but with very little real mourning on the part of those who had long been sufferers from his violent passions.

His nephew, a wild young officer, took possession of his property and estates, as he had left no will; and so it came to pass that the Baroness was cast adrift on the world with but a slender fortune at her disposal. Bringing Wilma with her, she came into Switzerland, that refuge of all the oppressed and persecuted of the surrounding nations, and there for the first time for more than five years I met her and my sister again. Wilma had grown and altered greatly, and were it not that she may chance to read these pages, I might speak of her striking beauty, and of the admiration which she excites in all the students and young officers who form our circle of acquaintance.

As for the Lady Eva—my reverence and admiration for her is too deep for words. I

look upon her as a sacred legacy from Max Reichner, to shield and protect in every way that is in my power, and when she asked me to take a lodging near to her and Wilma I yielded gladly—hoping at length to be able in some measure to fulfil one of my friend's last requests. She is as fair and sweet as ever, though her face has grown thin and her golden hair has a touch of gray. It would be strange, indeed, if all the sorrow that she has known had left no trace upon her tender, sensitive nature. But I believe she is truly happy now, and indeed she must have the blessing of one who gives up her life to the service of others. The little children round her home all know and love her; the poor and the sick, too, regard her as an angel from heaven; and the lads and maidens bring to her their troubles and pleasures, ever sure of her ready sympathy. She often speaks to me of Max Reichner, for why need there be any reserve between two who loved him so well, though in such different ways? I can see how the thought of him keeps her brave and cheerful in her daily life, and how she

loves to feel that she may in any way work as he did to help and comfort those who are in need.

It has been a very peaceful time, this year which we have spent all together in Zürich, and I am loath to bring it to a close by starting out again alone. How sorely I shall miss the Lady Eva's gentle presence and wise counsel, and Wilma's bright, sunny face and loving ways! Yet I feel that the time has come now when I may no longer stay in this safe and quiet harbour. My work is waiting for me in Bohemia—the work for which I have been preparing all these years, and I dare not delay in seeking it, for my twenty-third birthday is near, and I seem to have long been a man.

There is no question in my mind about the advisability of the Lady Eva and Wilma staying here in safety, where they have so many friends, and of late I have seen signs of what will, I trust, prove much to my little sister's happiness. My chief friend in Zürich, Fritz Liebenau, also a Bohemian by birth, has a good practice as a physician, and is an

earnest member of our Church. He comes almost daily to our house, and if Wilma thinks that I have not noticed how her eyes light up at sight of him, she is very much deceived. Indeed, it would help me to go with an easier mind, if I knew that I should leave her as the wife of so good a fellow as Liebenau; and when I announce my intention of returning to my country, I do not doubt but that he will speak to me on the matter.

* * * * *

I had scarcely written these words when the door of my sunny little parlour opened, and the Lady Eva entered. I looked up at her ere I rose to draw a chair for her to the open window, and I thought that her face grows fairer and more saintly every day.

"I have come to talk to you, Hugh," she said, thanking me with a smile; "partly about Wilma, and partly about yourself. You have looked so grave of late, that I cannot help wondering whether your plans are beginning to be definitely fixed."

I told her of my resolve, hiding nothing

from her of the danger; but of course we both knew well that this would not stand in the way. We talked long and earnestly together, and I felt strengthened and encouraged by her wise and loving counsel.

"How glad Max would have been, if he were here to know!" she said at last, very softly; "it is wonderful that you should be the one raised up to follow him and go on with his work."

But I could not endure any comparison between us two, and I told her so, knowing full well how unworthy I am to tread in his footsteps.

"Nay, I think not wholly unworthy," she answered with a smile, through her tears; "you go forth like a young knight to fight in a noble cause, and, if it be God's will, you can but die as he did, where the battle is fiercest, and the honour of our King most at stake!"

We were both still after that for a while, for there are times when silence is more blessed than speech; and in that hour my resolution to depart at once for the work in Bohemia

grew strong, and to the carrying out of that resolve I trust, God helping me, to devote my life.

* * * * *

And as I close this record of my early days and of the last months of Max Reichner's life, and start afresh on a new chapter of my own, I feel that I can trust God with my future in hopeful faith, knowing that He has never made a mistake about His children, and that all the ways by which He leads them are appointed by His infinite love.

APPENDIX

IT may interest some of my readers to know that the Protestant Church in Bohemia still survives all the attempts which have been made to crush it.

A measure of toleration was granted by Joseph II. about 1740, but there was not full religious liberty till 1848, and then the little body of Protestants, weakened by centuries of persecution, had neither schools nor churches, neither pastors nor the means of training them.

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Should any reader be desirous to help in this work, information would doubtless be given by

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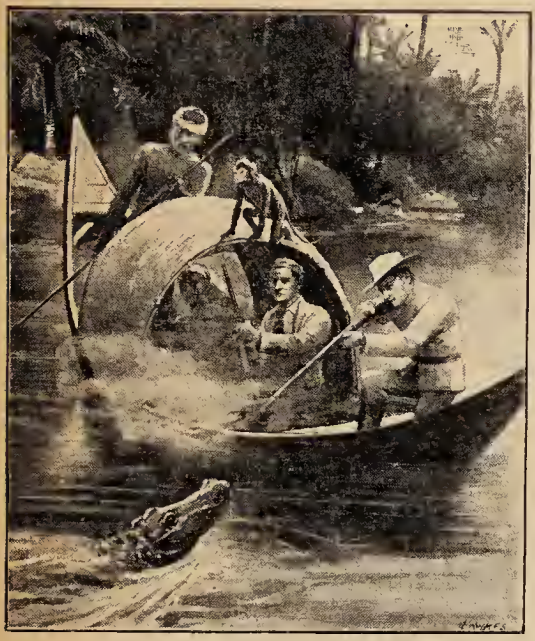

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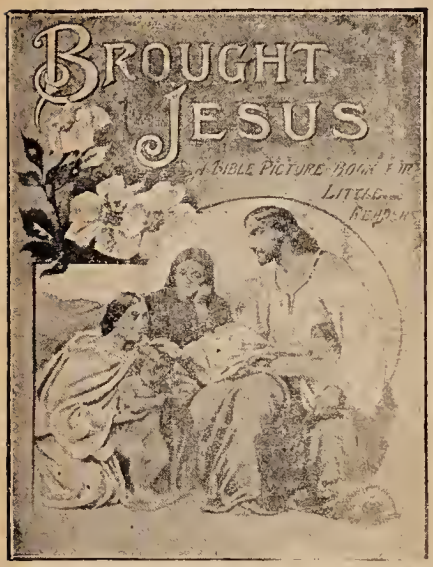

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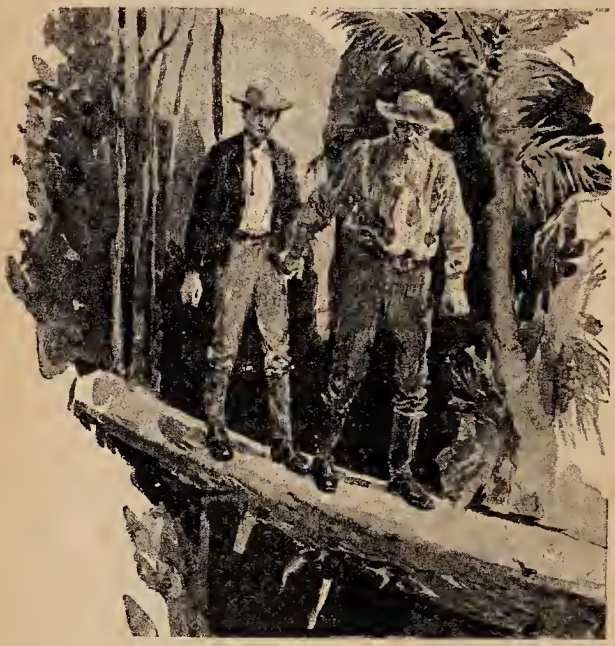

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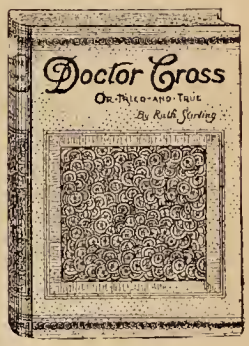

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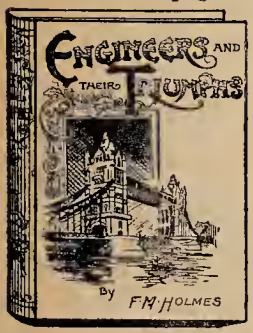

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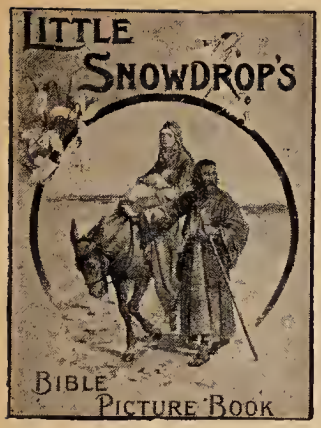

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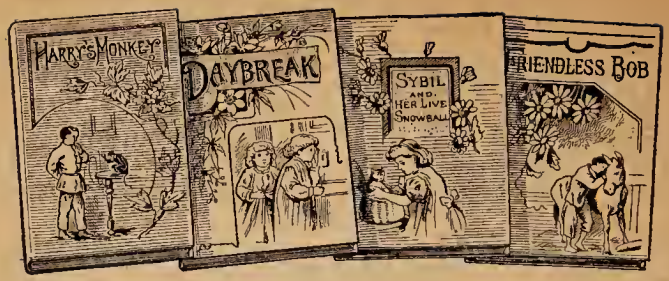

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